BODY BITS

LEA TASSIE

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by

Lea Tassie

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Acknowledgements
Grateful thanks to Leanne Taylor, my extraordinary eagle-eyed editor.

Fie, fie upon her!
There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.

(from *Othello* by William Shakespeare)

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Introduction

This book is about idioms based on parts of the human body.

An idiom is an expression whose meaning can't be deduced from those of the individual words. If you say that you've tripped over your own words, bitten your tongue, gotten your nose out of joint, or nipped a problem in the bud, other native English speakers will understand you, but people whose first language isn't English probably won't.

And vice versa, since every language has idioms. Many are derived from common human experiences, such as food, sex, sleep, emotions, and work. But they also develop from popular culture and historical events.

Body parts are an especially fruitful breeding ground for idioms and it's very likely that we've been using them since we lived in caves. We employ figurative language to explain unfamiliar concepts, as well as common events, in very physical, familiar terms. There's nothing more familiar to us than our bodies, so it's just a very easy place to go to try to describe something else that's more complex.

I dealt with about 2200 idioms (around 400 to do with the body) in my previous books, *Baa Baa, Black Sheep, Have You Any Words?, Two Shakes of a Lamb's Tail, The Wordy Ram*, and *Wild and Woolly Words*. This book contains around 1350 idioms, all of them about the body. And that's just the cream of the crop. Depending on what source you read, the English language contains up to a million idioms.

However, not all phrases classed as idioms by a dictionary are interesting. I've left out the boring ones and those with no stories. Even many of those I've included are listed in this book are under the title "Idioms in brief" because they can be explained by half a dozen (or fewer) words.

This book, then, contains 1350 examples of why English is a tough language to learn. Happy reading!

Chapter 1 — Body Language

body

The word "body" has several definitions. Here are the main ones, in brief:
—the entire physical structure of an organism, especially of a human or animal
—a corpse or carcass
—the main part of anything
—a mass of matter distinct from other masses
—a group of persons or things: "a body of cavalry"
—fullness and richness of flavor
—a quantity, as of material or information: "body of evidence"
—consistency of substance, as in paint, textiles, or wine
—a human being, a person

That last meaning is used in the poem *Comin Thro' the Rye*, attributed to Robert Burns (1759-1796), though the song itself, in some form or other, was known long before Burns. Here's a verse I like:

> Gin a body meet a body
> Comin thro' the glen,
> Gin a body kiss a body,
> Need the warld ken!

body language

"Body language" consists of the gestures, movements, and mannerisms by which people and other animals communicate without using spoken language and, often, without any conscious awareness of doing so. The first known use of the phrase was in 1885.

Body language includes facial expressions, body posture, gestures, eye movement, touch, and the use of space. In science, it's called kinesics. These nonverbal signals make up a huge part of daily communication. In fact, body language may account for 60 percent of all communication.

We smile, frown, wink, raise our eyebrows, gesture with our hands. Dogs wag their tails or perk their ears. Cats rub their foreheads against your leg or swivel their ears to catch subtle sounds.

Micro expressions (brief displays of emotion on the face), hand gestures, and posture all register in the human brain almost immediately—even when a person is not consciously aware they have perceived anything. For this reason, body language can strongly color how an individual is perceived, and how he or she, in turn, interprets others' motivation, mood, and openness.

Interpretation of body language tends to vary in different cultural contexts. Within a society, consensus exists regarding the accepted understandings and interpretations of specific behaviors. Some gestures are probably universally understood; others rely on understanding the culture.

able-bodied

To be "able-bodied" means you're not physically disabled. You are, one hopes, strong and healthy, with a sound body which is physically competent and fit for service.

in a body

If people do something "in a body," they do it together as a group. For example, "The cleaning staff went in a body to the manager to complain."

beach body

A "beach body" is one with a slender, toned physique that is especially attractive or appealing in a bathing suit.

body blow

Literally, in boxing, a body blow is one delivered to the front of the torso above the waist. Figuratively, a body blow is a serious setback or a major disappointment. For example, "This last recession dealt a body blow to our whole industry."

bodybuilding

"Bodybuilding" means developing the body through exercise and diet, especially for competitive exhibition. This is usually undertaken for aesthetic purposes over functional ones, distinguishing it from similar activities such as powerlifting and calisthenics.

In competitive bodybuilding, competitors appear onstage in line-ups and perform specified poses for a panel of judges who rank them based on conditioning, muscularity, posing, size, stage presentation, and symmetry. Bodybuilders prepare for competitions by exercising and eliminating non-essential body fat. This is enhanced at the final stage by a combination of carbohydrate loading and dehydration to achieve maximum muscle definition and vascularity. Most bodybuilders also tan and shave their bodies prior to competition.

Stone-lifting competitions were practiced in ancient Egypt and Greece. Western weightlifting developed in Europe from 1880 to 1953, with strongmen displaying feats of strength for the public and challenging each other. Here, the focus was not on their physique, and they possessed relatively large bellies and fatty limbs compared to bodybuilders of today.

body check

This phrase is a move in ice hockey or lacrosse in which a player impedes another with his body. It can also mean to perform a body check on someone, as in a nursing home.

body count

A body count is the number of persons or bodies counted as casualties, especially those killed in a disaster or battle. It can also be used to mean the total number of people present in a situation or participating in an event or activity, such as a concert, or sport.

body english

The phrase "body English" is a common idiom used in American English to describe the often subtle and unconscious physical movements one makes as if trying to influence an object or an action already under way. It is often used in sports, such as basketball or bowling, when a player uses his or her body language as if doing so will help guide the ball towards its intended target.

The idiom is believed to have originated in the early 20th century. Some suggest that it may have been derived from the practice of using body movements to communicate with horses during horseback riding competitions.

Another theory suggests that it may have come from the game of billiards, where players would use their bodies as if to help guide the ball towards its intended pocket. This practice became known as "body English," and eventually evolved into a broader idiom used across many different contexts.

I saw a vivid example of body English when sitting in stalled traffic behind a pickup truck. The young driver kept bouncing up and down in his seat, leaning forward, and shaking his fists as if this movement would impel the traffic to move. Five minutes later, he was still bouncing but the traffic hadn't moved an inch.

body of evidence

In its broadest definition, "body of evidence" refers to anything that is presented to prove something else is true or exists. It is a collection of information and data that supports a particular argument or opinion. For example, "There is a growing body of evidence that charges are too high."

In the legal system, evidence may include anything from witness testimony to documents, objects, and photographs. "The defense team presented a body of evidence suggesting the defendant's innocence."

body of opinion

Generally it means that a considerable number of people (not necessarily a majority) agrees on a certain thing. For example, the body of opinion in the US is that motor scooters are dangerous.

body politic

A "body politic" is defined as the people of a politically organized nation or state considered as a group.

The concept of the "body politic," originally meaning a human society viewed as a collective body, originated in classical Greek and Roman philosophy. The general metaphor emerged in the 6th century BCE, with the Athenian statesman Solon and the poet Theognis. In these early formulations, Greek thinkers typically confined themselves to distinguishing the ruler as head of the body, and comparing crises of the state to biological disease.

The Romans were the first to develop the anatomy in full detail, endowing it with "nerves, blood, breath, limbs, and organs." The concept was connected to a politicized version of Aesop's fable, *The Belly and the Members*, told in relation to the temporary departure of the plebeian order from Rome in 495–93 BCE. The Roman historian Livy writes that a senator explained the situation to the plebeians by a metaphor: the various members of the Roman body had become angry that the "stomach," the patricians, consumed their labors while providing nothing in return. However, upon their secession, they became feeble and realized that the stomach's digestion had provided them vital energy. Convinced by this story, the plebeians returned to Rome, and the Roman body was once more made whole and functional.

Late republican orators developed the image further, comparing attacks on Roman institutions to mutilations of the republic's body. Depicting the dictator Sulla as a surgeon out of control who had butchered the Roman body politic in the process of cutting out its putrefied limbs, Lucan used vivid language to portray the decline of the Roman Republic as a literal process of decay, its seas and rivers becoming choked with blood and gore.

Around 1159, John of Salisbury gave it a definitive medieval form in his *Policraticus*: the king was the body's head; the priest was the soul; the councilors were the heart; the eyes, ears, and tongue were the magistrates of the law; one hand, the army, held a weapon; the other, without a weapon, was the realm's justice. The body's feet were the common people. Each member of the body had its vocation, and each was beholden to work in harmony for the benefit of the whole body.

In the Late Middle Ages, the concept of the corporation, a legal person made up of a group of real individuals, gave the idea of a body politic judicial significance. In the 13th century, Baldus de Ubaldis developed the idea of the corporation as a *persona ficta*, a fictive person, and applied the concept to human societies as a whole.

For Baldus, man was not only, in Aristotelian terms, a "political animal," but the whole *populus*, the body of the people, formed a type of political animal in itself: a populus "has government as part of [its] existence, just as every animal is ruled by its own spirit and soul." In Canto XVIII of his *Paradiso*, Dante, writing in the early 14th century, presents the Roman Empire as a corporate body in the form of an imperial eagle, its body made of souls. The French court writer Christine de Pizan discussed the concept at length in her *Book of the Body Politic* (1407).

In the 15th century, the English jurist John Fortescue wrote that just as a physical body is "held together by the nerves," the mystical body of the realm is held together by the law.

body politics

Body politics, also known as biopolitics, investigates how political power intersects with biological life, shaping the bodies, behaviors, and well-being of populations. It explores how bodies are regulated and perceived within cultural, political, and social contexts, highlighting issues such as race, gender, and identity. Understanding body politics is crucial for recognizing how personal freedoms are influenced by broader systemic forces.

The powers at play in body politics include government laws, which encompass the regulation of health, reproduction, sexuality, and other aspects of biological existence such as the implementation of biometric identification systems. Other influences are economic production, habits of consumption, and personal power negotiated in intimate relations.

Because our identities are read from our bodies, superficial physical characteristics—eye shape, hair texture, skin tone and complexion, and body

shape—are used to classify us into socially constructed racial groups. Within these groups, we are further classified again for class, gender, sexual identity and expression, age, religion, nationality, and ability. As a result, we ascribe meaning to human bodies based upon how we see and interpret each of these groupings and subgroupings, where we are socialized and taught how to perform as members of the various communities to which we belong, through body "rules. "

For example, in some communities, female pubic hair is frowned upon, viewed as unsightly and unsanitary. Therefore women who shave signal their conformity to this body rule, and those who do not shave signal their refusal to conform to the norm, for the body is read as a sign of one's commitments to diet, lifestyle, fashion, and consumption. As the body signals the self, its priorities, ethics, morals, and health, its surface becomes a means of displaying such commitments.

Tattoos, anyone?

body shaming

Body shaming is the act of humiliating and criticizing someone for their bodily features. This can include everything about the body, such as weight, height, hair color, skin color, body shape, facial features, and in its broadest sense may even include shaming of tattoos and piercings, or the physical marks left by disease.

Sometimes body shaming can extend to masculinity and femininity. For example, men with wide hips, prominent breasts, or lack of facial hair are sometimes shamed for appearing feminine. Similarly, women can be body shamed for having broad shoulders, a deep voice, or dressing in what is usually regarded as men's clothing. Extensive body shaming can have negative emotional effects, including lowered self-esteem and the development of issues such as eating disorders, anxiety, and depression.

Emotional problems also occur when people feel their bodies don't meet social criteria. Media and popular culture are very much at fault here, being saturated with messages emphasizing attractiveness as an important part of relationships and interpersonal interaction. And, of course, what is "attractive" depends on the current fads.

Some forms of body shaming have ancient origins in popular superstition, such as discrimination against people with red hair and those with black or brown skin. And, since we humans tend to look down upon or discriminate against those who don't belong to our own small group, the problem may not disappear until we do.

body slam

A "body slam" is a wrestling move in which one wrestler picks up and throws the other to the floor. However, the term body slam has also been used in other contexts to describe forceful physical actions and is sometimes used figuratively. For example, "Losing my court case was a real body slam."

body snatcher

A body snatcher is a person who steals corpses from graves and sells them, usually for purposes of dissection. This is distinct from grave robbery, since a grave robber just steals valuables from graves.

The term was coined primarily in regard to cases in the UK and US. However, there have been cases of body snatching in many countries, with the first recorded case dating back to 1319 in Bologna, Italy.

Those who practiced the act of body snatching and sale of corpses during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries were commonly referred to as resurrectionists or resurrection men. Resurrectionists in the UK, who often worked in teams and who primarily targeted more recently dug graves, would be hired in order to provide medical institutions and practitioners with a supply of fresh cadavers for the purpose of anatomical study. Despite a significant decline in body snatching as a practice, there are contemporary instances of body snatching.

The term is sometimes used to describe a corporate recruiter. If someone wants to snatch my body and place it in a more lucrative job, I'm ready to aid and abet.

bodysurfing

Bodysurfing is the sport of riding on a wave without a surfboard by planing on the chest and stomach. Bodysurfers often equip themselves with a pair of swim fins that aid propulsion and help to catch, ride, and kick out of waves. Some bodysurfers also use a wooden or foam handplane to get the chest out of the water and thus reduce drag. This is known as handplaning and is an offshoot of bodysurfing.

Some of the best waves for bodysurfing are steep, fast, tubing beachbreak waves that are often unsuitable for board surfing. Two of the best known are Sandy Beach and Makapuu on the east shore of Oahu in Hawaii.

Bodysurfing predates board-surfing, which may date as far back as 2000 BCE.

Recorded bodysurfing history, however, begins after that of board-surfing.

dogsbody

A dogsbody is a person who does menial work, a servant, someone who has to do all the unpleasant or boring jobs that no one else wants to do.

Originally, in the British Royal Navy, a dogsbody was a semi-sarcastic colloquialism for a junior officer or midshipman, both of whom would have had to work harder than more senior officers. A batman has a similar function. A rough American equivalent would be a package-handler, gofer, grunt, lackey, or workhorse.

The Royal Navy used dried peas boiled in a bag (pease pudding) as one of their staple foods circa the early 19th century. Sailors nicknamed this item "dog's body." Why this name, we do not know, though one website suggests the bag may have looked like a dog's body.

The term "dogsbody" has not always been derogatory, with a number of people deliberately using it as their callsign or handle. The most famous of these is probably Douglas Bader, who was an RAF fighter pilot during the Second World War.

full-bodied

To be described as full-bodied means having a large body, or importance and significance.
We use it of a beverage, to say that it is rich and has intensity of flavor or aroma. We might also use it to describe a voice singing an aria.

The term is often applied to women, too. Only the context will determine whether this is body shaming or body politics.

heavenly body

A "heavenly body" is a natural celestial object, visible in the sky, such as a star, planet, natural satellite, asteroid, comet, the Moon, or the Sun. Objects flying or moving in the atmosphere are not usually considered as heavenly bodies.

Early cultures found the movements of the bodies very important as they used these to help navigate over long distances, tell between the seasons, and to determine when to plant crops. During the Middle Ages, astronomers began to make detailed descriptions of stars and nebulae, and would make more

accurate calendars based on the movements of such bodies. They created devices to help study the celestial objects and wrote textbooks and guides.

This term is also applied to women but, in this case, it's romantic, not political.

keep body and soul together

To keep body and soul together means to have or get barely enough food and money to survive.

This expression is based on the Christian belief that the soul gives life to the body, which therefore cannot survive without it. Today it most often is applied to earning a living.

know where the bodies are buried

Of American-English origin, the phrase, "know where the bodies (or skeletons) are buried" means to have personal knowledge of the secrets or confidential affairs of an organization or individual. It implies that the secret knowledge is scandalous.

The term is often used in relation to a person who wields this information for his or her own benefit or advantage.

out-of-body experience

An out-of-body experience is a phenomenon in which a person perceives the world as if from a location outside his or her physical body. It's a form of autoscopy (literally "seeing self").

The term "out-of-body experience" was introduced in 1943 by G. N. M. Tyrrell in his book *Apparitions*, and was adopted by researchers as an alternative to belief-centric labels such as "astral projection" or "spirit walking."

The "astral body," according to some spiritual and metaphysical beliefs, is a non-physical counterpart to the physical human body, capable of traveling or projecting to distant locations. During astral projection, a person's consciousness is said to leave the physical body, allowing the individual to observe his or her physical form from a distance or visit distant locations unreachable by normal means.

For centuries, these strange phenomena have fascinated doctors, scientists, religious scholars, and amateur theorists. Generally, out-of-body experiences

are associated with illness, psychedelic drugs, sleep disorders, or traumatic incidents like brain injury, but British and Swiss researchers published studies in the academic journal *Science* in 2007 describing how it may be possible to produce out-of-body experiences in healthy people. One in ten people has an out-of-body experience once, or more commonly, several times in his or her life.

Some people report out-of-body experiences or lucid dreaming during sleep paralysis, which occurs when a person is falling asleep or awakening, characterized by a temporary inability to move or speak. The person is aware, can control his or her dreams and feel as though floating outside the body, observing it from an external viewpoint.

It sounds like a nice relief from an aching lower back, doesn't it?

over my dead body

If you say something will happen over your dead body, you mean that you will do everything you can to prevent it. In other words, "No way! Absolutely not!"

The origin of the phrase is not known but it has been used since the 1800s. The phrase is a hyperbole, meaning that it is exaggerated for effect. It is not supposed to be taken seriously.

There are sources that claim a serious origin. For example, it was used by knights when discussing the treasure that they had sworn to protect. The enemy would have to walk over their dead body to reach it.

One source explains the expression this way: "Over my dead body" comes from a Great Pyrenees dog breed trait. If a farmer's sheep were ever harmed, the Great Pyrenees dog was usually found dead too, killed while trying to protect the flock. Today these dogs are used for avalanche rescue, cart pulling, sledding, flock guarding, battle, companionship, and guarding. Their personalities are calm, well-mannered, somewhat serious, loyal, gentle, affectionate, and devoted.

with every bone in one's body

If you do something with every bone in your body, you're using all your energy, effort, and conviction.

Chapter 2 — Brainy

(brain, mind)

brain

The brain is the organ inside the head that controls thought, memory, feelings, and physical activity. It is a central part of the nervous system and is responsible for processing information and coordinating actions in the body.

Perhaps it's because the brain is responsible for the mind that the language has so many "brain" words to mean stupid: beetlebrain, brack-brain, brain-dead, crackbrain, birdbrain, feather brain, lamebrain, shit-for-brains, and rattlebrain. On the other hand, if you're "brainy," you're intelligent, clever, or brilliant.

Idioms in brief:

—a light bulb goes on in one's brain: sudden insight

—all brawn and no brain: strong but stupid

—beat one's brain: intense mental effort

—blow one's brains out: fatally shoot in the head

—brain box: very intelligent person

—brain bucket: helmet

—brain cramp: temporary mental lapse

—brain dump: transfer of knowledge

—brain someone: hit on the head

—brain trust: a group of experts

—brain-picking: gathering information

—brain-twister: a challenging puzzle

—brainchild: original idea

—got it on the brain: obsessive thinking

—have a moonflaw in the brain: act very strangely

—have one's brain on a leash: drunk

—no-brainer: an easy, obvious decision

—put your brain in gear: start thinking clearly

—scatterbrain: flighty or disorganized

—the brains of the outfit: the leader

—the brains: intelligent people

birdbrain

The word "birdbrain" is current slang for a person who is not too smart. Back in the 1600s, it was "bird-witted."

Early neuroscientists thought that birds' cerebrums were primitive and only allowed instinctual behavior. But new research sheds light on the intelligence of birds. Not only are they capable of cognitive behavior, but many species also have an intelligence level on par with primates and five-year-old human children.

brain candy

"Brain candy" is entertainment that is pleasant, enjoyable, and appealing to a broad audience but not intellectually stimulating or demanding.

brain drain

"Brain drain" is the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector, or field for another, usually for better pay or living conditions.

brain fart

A "brain fart (or fade)" is a momentary mental lapse caused especially by carelessness, forgetfulness, or inattention. It can also refer to something ill-considered and said or done impulsively.

brain wave

In science, a "brain wave" is the rhythmic fluctuation of electric potential between parts of the brain, as seen on an electroencephalogram. In everyday language, it means a sudden inspiration or the understanding of a complex situation.

brain-teaser

A brain-teaser is a type of puzzle or problem designed to challenge and entertain the mind. It often involves thinking creatively, using logic and lateral thinking skills to find a solution. Brain teasers come in many forms, such as riddles, puzzles, or visual challenges. They typically require you to think outside the box, consider multiple perspectives, and sometimes make unexpected connections to arrive at the correct answer.

In Spanish, the word for brain-teasers is "rompecabezas." The word translates literally to "it breaks heads."

Brain teasers have captivated the human mind for centuries. Some common names for them include: conundrums, enigmas, logic puzzles, mathematical puzzles, and riddles.

game brain

"Game brain" is a term coined by Akio Mori referring to human brains affected by the long-term effect of playing video games. Mori, a professor in the Humanities and Sciences division of Nihon University in Japan, originally coined the term and presented the concept in his 2002 book *The Terror of Game Brain*.

Mori claimed his studies found that players exhibited less activity in the brain's prefrontal region, which is responsible for creativity and emotion, over long periods of time. However, no other variables were considered, including the major one of fatigue from long gaming sessions. Mori asserts that side effects can include loss of concentration, an inability to control temper and problems socializing or associating with others.

His theory has gained some recognition in popular culture, especially among parents who believe that video gaming can have detrimental effects on child development. It has sometimes affected local policy and decision-making regarding the selling of games to minors.

Mori's theory was criticized as unwarranted research by established neuroscientists and brain specialists, because he used unreliable measures and misinterpreted the fluctuation of beta waves.

it's not brain surgery

The phrase "it's not brain surgery" describes a task that's easy, lacks complexity and is simple to understand and do. Brain surgery, of course, is complex, difficult, and delicate. Other phrases meaning the same thing are:
—a piece of cake
—a walk in the park
—as easy as pie
—it's not rocket science

brain freeze

A brain freeze, also known as an ice-cream headache, is a headache resulting from the rapid consumption of cold food or beverages.

The condition is caused by a cold substance touching the roof of the mouth, and is believed to result from a nerve response causing rapid constriction and

swelling of blood vessels, "referring" pain from the roof of the mouth to the head. It can also occur during a sudden exposure of the unprotected head to cold temperatures, such as by diving into cold water.

According to *The New Yorker*, the first written account of a cold-stimulus headache comes from Patrick Brydone in the 1770s. Brydone described a British naval officer in Sicily who consumed a large bite of ice cream and spat it out, "with a horrid oath."

rack your brain

To rack your brain is to think very hard, or struggle to remember something.

The rack was a medieval torture device. The crude but effective racks often tore the victim's limbs from their bodies. It isn't surprising that 'rack' was adopted as a verb meaning to cause pain and anguish. Shakespeare used it that way in *Twelfth Night*.

The same idea was used by the composer William Byrd in 1583 when he wrote: "Racke not thy wit to winne by wicked waies." (The perfect quote to illustrate alliteration!)

But there's a catch in terms of how to spell "rack." Rack and wrack in "rack one's brain" and "nerve-wracking" have been used interchangeably since the late 1800s, and both spellings are common today. Choosing which one to use can be nerve-racking.

So, do you "rack your brain" or "wrack your brain"? Or is your brain sufficiently wrecked by this point that you don't care?

Here is one way to distinguish between the two words. When using one of them as a noun you are almost certainly looking for rack. You hang your clothes on a rack, eat a rack of lamb, and torture someone on a rack. The noun wrack is used only when you need to refer to a wrecked ship or some form of marine vegetation.

The two words did come from different sources—rack is thought to be from the Middle Dutch word *recken*, meaning "to stretch," and wrack comes from the Middle English word for a shipwreck, *wrak*—and the two words do retain different meanings. However, wrack has so often been used as a variant spelling of rack, that many dictionaries now list it as a variant. Usage guides offer contradictory advice on these matters.

Some usage guides provide a way of dealing with this question that has a certain brutal charm: just stop using the word wrack. This is the method that is

advocated by *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*, which points out that wrack is archaic, and then informs the reader that they should simply "substitute a modern synonym."

brainstorm

A brainstorm can be:
—a sudden clever plan or idea
—a sudden, violent disturbance of the mind
—a sudden brilliant insight

As you would expect, the word brainstorm involves thought. A brainstorm can be an "Aha!" moment, while brainstorming is the process of trying to think of ideas.

baby brain

"Baby brain" is a name for the condition often experienced by pregnant women, characterized by forgetfulness and difficulty concentrating. It is thought to be caused by hormonal changes and the mental focus shifting towards the baby.

brain food

Brain food refers to any food that contains nutrients thought to promote brain function and health, such as omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and vitamins. These foods are believed to enhance cognitive abilities and overall brain performance.

If spinach and kale are brain foods, then I'm going to stay stupid.

brain-burned

"Brain-burned" typically refers to a state of mental exhaustion or cognitive impairment, where a person feels overwhelmed, confused, or unable to think clearly. This can happen after prolonged periods of stress or intense mental activity or, perhaps more commonly, from the overuse of drugs. Terms with similar meanings are "brain-fried" and "burnout."

brainwashing

Brainwashing is the systematic effort to effect a radical change in the ideas and beliefs (of a person), especially by methods based on isolation, sleeplessness, hunger, extreme discomfort, pain, and the alternation of kindness and cruelty.

"Brainwashing" is also a colloquial term that refers in general to psychological techniques that manipulate action or thought against a person's will, desire, or knowledge. It attempts to damage individual or group attitudes, frames of reference, beliefs, values or loyalties by demonstrating that current thinking patterns and attitudes are wrong and need change. Brainwashing is said to reduce its subject's ability to think critically or independently, to allow the introduction of new, unwanted thoughts and ideas into their minds.

The term was first used in English by Edward Hunter in 1950 to describe how the Chinese government appeared to make people cooperate with them during the Korean War. Research into the concept also looked at Nazi Germany and present-day North Korea, at some criminal cases in the US, and in the induction of people into cults. The Chinese term for brainwashing punned on the Taoist custom of "cleansing/washing the heart/mind" before conducting ceremonies or entering holy places.

The concept of brainwashing has been raised in defense of criminal charges, such as the case of Charles Manson, who was said to have brainwashed his followers to commit murder and other crimes. Another example is that of Patty Hearst, a 19-year-old kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army, a left-wing militant organization. After several weeks of captivity, she agreed to join the group and took part in their activities.

Joost Meerloo, a Dutch psychiatrist, coined the neologism "menticide," meaning "killing of the mind." Meerloo's view was influenced by his experiences during the German occupation of his country during WWII and his work with the Dutch government and the American military in the interrogation of accused Nazi war criminals. He later emigrated to the United States and taught at Columbia University. His best-selling 1956 book, *The Rape of the Mind*, concludes by saying:
"The modern techniques of brainwashing and menticide—those perversions of psychology—can bring almost any man into submission and surrender. Many of the victims of thought control, brainwashing, and menticide that we have talked about were strong men whose minds and wills were broken and degraded."

Brainwashing has become a common theme in popular culture especially in war stories, thrillers, and science fiction stories. In casual speech, "brainwashing" and its verb form, "brainwash," are used figuratively to describe the use of propaganda to sway public opinion.

George Orwell's 1949 dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provides an excellent portrayal of brainwashing. The main character is subjected to imprisonment, isolation, and torture to conform his thoughts and emotions to

the wishes of the rulers of the book's fictional future totalitarian society.

Quotes:
And, finally, two apt quotes from *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), by A.A. Milne.

"When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and you Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it."

"For I am a bear of very little brain, and long words bother me."

mind

The mind is the center of all mental activity. It's where your thinking happens. Part of the brain, the "mind" allows you to think, feel emotions, and understand things. It includes all mental processes, including perception, memory, and reasoning.

The mind plays a central role in most aspects of human life as the seat of consciousness, emotions, thoughts, and sense of personal identity. Various fields of inquiry study the mind; the main ones include psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, and philosophy of mind.

Idioms in brief:
—a load off one's mind: a great relief
—a meeting of minds: agreement
—a one-track mind: focused on a single subject
—an open mind: able to give fair consideration to an idea
—at the back of one's mind: an awareness
—be in two minds: unable to decide
—bear in mind: to consider or remember
—cast your mind back: try to remember
—change one's mind: change an opinion or choice
—clear one's mind: achieve mental calm
—close one's mind: resist considering something
—concentrate the mind: focus one's thoughts

—ease one's mind: relieve of anxiety
—frame of mind: mood or attitude
—give someone a piece of your mind: express anger
—have a mind to do something: a strong inclination
—know your own mind: be confident in your ideas
—make up your mind: decide
—mind like a steel trap: a quick, sharp intelligence
—mind-bender: very complex or difficult
—mind-boggling: intellectually or emotionally overwhelming
—mind-numbing: dull, boring
—of sound mind: sane and competent
—one's mind goes blank: one suddenly forgets
—peace of mind: contentment
—presence of mind: sensible and cool-headed
—prey on one's mind: worry, concern, anxiety
—read your mind: know what you're thinking
—slip one's mind: forget unintentionally
—spring to mind: suddenly think about
—tickle the mind: amuse, delight or excite
—to one's mind: in one's opinion
—turn one's mind to something: focus on a project
—weigh on your mind: make you anxious
—with something in mind: for a particular reason

out of your mind

If you're out of your mind, you're insane. The phrase can also be used to say that something has made you very worried, unhappy, or angry. For example, "This rainy weather is driving me insane." A similar term is "off the leash."

have a mind of your own

Having a mind of your own means having your own ideas and making your own choices about what should be done. It means having the ability to think, act, or form opinions without outside influence. The phrase is often used (humorously) to describe an inanimate object that cannot be controlled by its owner. It's also often used (accurately) to describe a cat.

bloody-minded

"Bloody-minded" means being tiresome, stubborn, and obstructive, refusing to give up, to change your mind, or to do what others want you to do. It can also mean being ready and willing to accept bloodshed or resort to violence, as in "a bloody-minded dictator."

The latter meaning is now rarely used. Shakespeare did so in *King Henry VI1*.

great minds think alike

"Great minds think alike" means that very intelligent people tend to come up with the same ideas at the same time. It's usually used playfully, to commend someone for expressing the same thing you were thinking of and implies that you are congratulating that person for being as smart as you are.

Unimpressed listeners often remark, "small minds and fools seldom differ."

The earliest written example is in Carl Theodor von Unlanski's biography *The woful history of the unfortunate Eudoxia* (1816).

Thomas Paine, the English-born revolutionary who became one of the founding fathers of the USA, like many today, had a different response to the idea that 'great minds think alike,' that is, "No, they don't." He expressed that opinion in the 1792 political pamphlet *The Rights of Man*, edition 2.

mind your own business

The phrase "mind your own business" is used to tell someone in a rude way that you do not want them to pry into or be nosy about your affairs. Contextually, it is often used to refute, reject, or discourage other peoples' concerns or comments.

The wisdom of minding your own business was observed in ancient times by Plato, Seneca, and others. Among many later writers echoing this sentiment was Lewis Carroll, in one of his enjoyable non sequiturs (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865), "'If everybody minded their business,' the Duchess said in a hoarse growl, 'the world would go round a great deal faster than it does.'"

The first coin that was minted and officially circulated by the US, the Fugio Cent, displays the words "Mind Your Business" on the obverse.

In the 1930s, a slang version arose as "Mind your own beeswax." It is meant to soften the rudeness of the retort.

mind's ear

The "mind's ear" is the name for the ability that we have to recall sounds, usually speech or music, and replay them in our mind. (This is similar to the "mind's eye," which is responsible for mental imagery.)

The first person known to have given the sense a name was the English poet Matthew Green (as Peter Drake), in *The Grotto*, 1733: "The thinking Sculpture helps to raise Deep thoughts, the Genii of the place: To the minds ear, and inward sight, There silence speaks."

never mind

You use this phrase to tell someone not to worry about something, often when you get tired of trying to explain something to someone who doesn't seem smart enough to understand.

A very slangy version adds the word "no."
—makes me no never mind
—pay him no nevermind
—it's no nevermind of yours

out of sight, out of mind

This phrase means that whatever can't be seen will be forgotten. This phrase has been proverbial since Homer's time. The Greek poet had it in the Odyssey (c. 50 BCE).

In spite of its age, 19th century writers must have thought that 'out of sight, out of mind' lacked something as a proverb and went to the trouble of coining its exact opposite —'absence makes the heart grow fonder.'

Half the proverb, "out of sight," a twentieth-century slangy expression meaning "Wonderful!" or "Beyond belief!" is already a cliché.

The phrase 'out of sight, out of mind' was supposed to have been translated by a computer speech recognition program as 'invisible idiot.' Which maybe proves that although anyone can make a mistake, but to really foul things up you need a computer.

on my mind

"On my mind" (also termed as "on the brain") means to be preoccupied, as in "I didn't mean to be rude; I just have a lot on my mind right now."

Otherwise, we say something is "in my mind" to denote that we have

remembered something but it is not at the forefront of our thoughts.

a legend in his own mind

"A legend in his own mind" is a person who believes that he or she is of greater importance or notoriety than is actually the case.

The original use of this phrase was "a legend in her lifetime," written of Florence Nightingale by Giles Lytton Strachey, in his well-known book *Eminent Victorians* (1918).

The associated term "living legend" sprang up in the US in 1939 and immediately grabbed the imagination of writers there, who applied the term, in that year alone, to Jack Dempsey, Cordell Hull, Diego Rivera, Fielding H. Yost, and D.B. MacRae.

Strachey's phrase has spawned imitations. My favorite is "A legend in his own lunchtime," often used humorously about chefs or notorious drinkers.

lose your marbles

To "lose your marbles" means to become mentally incompetent, to lose your mind.

In the 1954 film *The Caine Mutiny* Humphrey Bogart linked insanity with marbles when he showed his character, the demented Lt. Cmdr. Queeg, restlessly jiggling a set of metal balls when under stress in court. Bogart's performance was so good that many believe the film to be the source of the phrase. But the phrase originated in the late 1800s, not the 1950s, and is now often shortened to simply 'losing it.'

Marbles are the little glass balls that children use to play the game of the same name. From the mid-1800s, the word was also used to mean personal effects or goods, deriving from the French word *meubles*, which means 'furniture.' Since the 1920s, the US expression 'to pick up the marbles' has meant 'to carry off the honors or prizes' and 'to withdraw from the activity or game and cause it to cease.' The word 'marbles' also meant testicles and has been used that way since at least the mid 1800s.

It's probable that 'marbles' was coined as a slang term meaning 'common sense,' as a reference to the marbles that youngsters play with. The notion of losing something that is important to you appears to have arisen from the image of a forlorn child having lost his prized toys.

to mind

"To mind" means to pay attention to something. This phrase can be applied to many things, such as: mind your language, your manners, your back, your step, the shop, and how you go. "Don't mind me" says "Ignore me." "Comes to mind" means to remember.

mind games

Mind games (also power games or head games) refer to manipulative behaviors intended to influence someone's thoughts or actions, often giving one person an advantage over another. They can occur in various contexts, including relationships and competitive situations, and typically involve psychological tactics rather than direct communication. This action is also called 'gaslighting.'

Between thirty and forty such games (as well as variations of each) were described and tabulated in Eric Berne's best seller on the subject titled *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships*. According to one transactional analyst, "Games are so predominant and deep-rooted in society that they tend to become institutionalized, that is, played according to rules that everybody knows about and more or less agrees to."

Please, can we play marbles instead?

mind over matter

"Mind over matter" refers to the ability of the mind to control or influence physical conditions or challenges. It emphasizes the power of mental determination in overcoming obstacles or difficulties.

The idea is very old, expressed by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. In the twentieth century, however, the cliché is most often invoked for or by someone who is carrying on normal activities despite being physically ill or otherwise incapacitated. The humorist Jack Benny quipped, "Age is strictly a case of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter" (quoted in *New York Times*, Feb. 15, 1974).

The phrase "mind over matter" appeared in 1863 in *The Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man* by Sir Charles Lyell (1797–1875) and was first used to refer to the increasing status and evolutionary growth of the minds of animals and man throughout Earth's history.

"It may be said that, so far from having a materialistic tendency, the supposed introduction into the earth at successive geological periods of life — sensation, instinct, the intelligence of the higher mammalia bordering on reason, and lastly, the improvable reason of Man himself — presents us with a

picture of the ever-increasing dominion of mind over matter. "

The phrase also relates to the ability to control the perception of pain that one may be experiencing.

mind-meld

A mind-meld refers to a telepathic ability in the Star Trek universe, primarily used by Vulcans, allowing two individuals to share thoughts and feelings intimately. In the real world, it can also describe a deep compatibility in opinion or plans between two people in a more general context.

poison someone's mind

To "poison someone's mind" means to influence someone negatively by filling their thoughts with harmful or false ideas about another person or an idea. This often involves spreading lies or rumors to create distrust or dislike.

time out of mind

"Time out of mind" means since ancient times, prior to anyone's recall. Apparently this term comes from English law, where it meant beyond legal memory—that is, before the reign of Richard I (1189– 99). That date was fixed by the Statute of Westminster (1275) as the legal limit for bringing certain kinds of legal action (similar to the present-day statute of limitations). Later it came to mean simply a very long time ago.

speak one's mind

To "speak one's mind" is to voice one's thoughts bluntly, honestly, and frankly, without holding back. The idea of saying what you think is probably ancient, but the expression is first seen in Shakespeare's works as, "Give me leave to speak my mind" (*As You Like It*).

mind like a sieve

Having a "mind like a sieve" means that a person has a very poor memory and tends to forget things easily. This idiom suggests that information slips away just like particles fall through a sieve, which is a kitchen tool with small holes in it, used for separating solids from liquids or very small pieces of food from larger pieces.

One interesting theory about the source of the idiom links it to ancient Greek mythology, specifically the story of the Danaids. The Danaids were the fifty daughters of Danaus, of whom forty-nine murdered their husbands on their

wedding nights. As punishment in the underworld, they were condemned to eternally carry water in sieves or bottomless vessels, never able to fill them.

Chapter 3 — Blood and Flesh

(blood, flesh, muscle, skin)

blood

Blood is the fluid that circulates in the body, transporting oxygen and nutrients to cells while removing waste products. It consists of plasma, red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets, and plays a crucial role in maintaining health and supporting bodily functions.

It's also a very pretty color, and has given birth to many idioms.

Idioms in brief:

—after someone's blood: seeking revenge

—blood in one's eye: angry and seeking revenge

—blood on one's hands: be guilty of killing

—blood will have blood: violent acts breed violent acts

—burst a blood vessel: be angry or very energetic

—have one's blood up: be angry or inflamed

—hell's bells and buckets of blood: exclamation

—hot-blooded: easily angered or aroused; excitable

—make one's blood curdle: frighten or disgust

—new/young blood: people viewed as invigorating

—piss blood: be very anxious or over-exert oneself

—royal blood: noble ancestry

—spit blood: to be very angry

—sporting blood: love of sports or athletics

—stir the blood: create excitement

—too rich for one's blood: too expensive

—worms in blood: spaghetti in tomato sauce

bloodsport

A bloodsport (or blood sport) is a category of sport or entertainment that involves bloodshed, such as bullfighting, cockfighting, dog fighting, and some forms of hunting and fishing. Activities characterized as blood sports, but involving only human participants, include the ancient Roman gladiatorial games.

Figuratively, the term also is used to describe ruthless or cutthroat competition

and any activity that revels in the misfortune of others.

Limitations on blood sports have been enacted in much of the world. Proponents of blood sports often contend that they are traditional within the culture. Bullfighting is sometimes called a tragic spectacle, because in many forms of the event, the bull is invariably killed and the bullfighter is always at risk of death.

So we should call it blood theater?

bad blood

"Bad blood" describes anger or animosity, as in a serious feud, between individuals or groups. "There's been bad blood between the two families for years."

This term is based on the old association with blood and emotion. Blood was long regarded as the seat of human emotion, and by the sixteenth century it was particularly associated with high temper and anger.

bay for blood

To "bay (or scream) for blood" means to angrily demand or threaten violence, to seek revenge or retribution in a specially hostile manner.

The phrase has been around since the 1600s and was likely coined by William Shakespeare in *Macbeth*. It's been used in literature and popular culture since then, often to describe situations when people are calling for justice or revenge after a wrong has been done.

When people bay for blood, they are essentially asking for justice to be served through violence. It could also mean an intense eagerness for battle or a fight.

blood and thunder

The phrase "blood and thunder" is used to mean unrestrained and violent action. It originated as an oath, alluding to mayhem and bloodshed, and is found as early as the mid 18th century in *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle* by Tobias Smollett (1751).

It became a stock expression for authors of historical melodramas and by the 19th century such cheap "penny dreadful" fictions were also known as "blood and thunders." Despite being scorned by the literary elite, these stories are still popular.

blood and guts

"Blood and guts" means great vigor, violence, or fierceness, as in a blood-and-guts book, a blood-and-guts competition, or fundamental concerns: "blood-and-guts issues."

The phrase achieved fame when it was used by General George S. Patton in a speech to the Third Army in 1944, before the Allied invasion of France. The speech was intended to motivate the inexperienced Third Army for impending combat.

Patton urged his soldiers to do their duty regardless of personal fear, and exhorted them to aggressiveness and constant offensive action. His profanity-laced speaking was viewed as unprofessional by some officers but the speech appealed to his men. Some historians have called his oration one of the greatest motivational speeches of all time.

From that speech: "War is a bloody business, a killing business. The Nazis are the enemy. Wade into them, spill their blood or they will spill yours. Shoot them in the guts. Rip open their belly. When shells are hitting all around you and you wipe the dirt from your face and you realize that it's not dirt, it's the blood and guts of what was once your best friend, you'll know what to do."

Patton's nicknames were "Bandito" and "Old Blood and Guts."

blood, sweat, and tears

"Blood, sweat, and tears" refers to the immense effort, hard work, and personal sacrifice in difficult circumstances.

The expression was used by Sir Winston Churchill in his famous "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat" speech in 1940, when he warned the British people of the hardships to come in fighting WWII.

Churchill borrowed 'blood, sweat, and tears' for his famous wartime speech from either the Bible or from Theodore Roosevelt, but he can certainly take credit for the popular take-up of the phrase into everyday language.

Roosevelt had uttered a phrase similar to Churchill's in an address to the United States Naval War College on 2 June 1897, following his appointment as federal Assistant Secretary of the Navy: "Every man among us is more fit to meet the duties and responsibilities of citizenship because of the perils over which, in the past, the nation has triumphed; because of the blood and sweat and tears, the labor and the anguish, through which, in the days that have gone, our forefathers moved on to triumph."

Many of the things Churchill is supposed to have said are wrongly attributed. One of the better ones that can be verified is his exchange with the socialite and politician Nancy Astor:

> Astor: "Winston, if I were your wife I would put poison in your coffee!"
> Churchill: "And if I were your husband I would drink it."

Blood, Sweat & Tears is an American jazz rock band formed in 1967 in New York City, known for blending rock, pop, and rhythm and blues with jazz elements.

blue blood

"Blue blood" is that which supposedly flows in the veins of old and aristocratic families.

'Blue blood' is a literal translation of the Spanish *sangre azul*. This was the designation attributed to some of the oldest and proudest families of Castile, who claimed never to have intermarried with Moors or other races. The expression probably originated in the blueness of the veins of people of fair complexion as compared with those of dark skin.

flesh and blood

"Flesh and blood" is used to mean your family, the people genetically related to you, or the human body and its limitations. We often say, "I'm only human," meaning that we are imperfect.

The pairing of flesh and blood dates back to the Bible. In English, it appears in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, and numerous other writings, mostly in the meaning of being only human.

"More than flesh and blood can bear," meaning unpleasant, painful, or offensive, is a phrase we often use humorously or ironically. "The mental and physical torture from insomnia is more than flesh and blood can stand."

The other sense, of blood relations, appeared in a 1300 manuscript, as well as in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* (where Gobbo says to his son, "If thou be Launcelot, thou art mine own flesh and blood.").

in cold blood

To do something "in cold blood" is to do it deliberately and without emotion. It's typically said of a murder that is committed in a calm and deliberate manner.

This expression alludes to the idea that blood is the seat of emotion and is hot in passion and cold in calm. According to medieval physiology, blood was naturally hot, and so this phrase refers to an unnatural state in which someone can carry out a (hot-blooded) deed of passion or violence without the normal heating of the blood.

In recent times Truman Capote used the term as the title of a detailed account (1965) of a deliberate act of murder.

run in one's blood

To say that something "runs in one's blood" means that the trait is so characteristic as to seem inherited or passed down by family tradition.

A similar phrase, "blood will tell," means that one will inevitably display the unfavorable qualities of one's relatives.

taste blood

To "taste blood" is to achieve a small victory or advantage over an opponent, giving one the encouragement or confidence to pursue total victory. "The underdog tasted blood with her victory in the first round, and she's coming out with guns blazing to try to secure a championship title today."

The origin of the idiom seems to be the myth that dogs, if they kill another animal, will develop a "taste for blood," or turn aggressive upon tasting blood. In other words, "go feral." This is not proven, though animals do possess a feral instinct. The somewhat widely accepted possibility that an animal tasting blood will have it lunging for your throat is a likely source of the phrase. It denotes a somewhat savage desire for victory after wounding an opponent, be it in sports or any other competitive, aggressive interaction between individuals.

you can't get blood from a stone

This phrase means that you cannot extract what isn't there to begin with.

There is a theory that this and similar phrases originated in Italian. In the 1640s to 1660s, the writer Giovanni Torriano wrote several books to aid Italian/English translation. Two phrases he included were:

> There's no getting of blood out of that wall.
> To fetch blood out of a turnip is to attempt impossibilities.

These phrases often refer to a task that is difficult or impossible to accomplish, like getting someone to do what you want. For example, "getting that skinflint

Jack to pay for a round of drinks is like getting blood out of a stone."

sweat blood

To "sweat blood" means to suffer intense distress, anxiety, worry, or fear. It can also mean to work intensely and diligently; to expend all of one's energy or effort doing something. "My mother and father sweated blood to provide for me and all my siblings."

bloodshed

To "shed (spill) blood" means to wound or kill someone violently, often by inflicting wounds in which blood literally spills out of the body. For example, "It was a bitter fight but fortunately no blood was shed."

Both terms allude to causing blood to flow and fall on the ground. The phrases date from the Medieval period.

blood and iron

"Blood and iron" refers to reliance on military power and force rather than diplomatic means to achieve political goals. This phrase is famously associated with Otto von Bismarck, who used it in an 1862 speech to emphasize the importance of military strength in the unification of Germany.

bloodbath

A "bloodbath" is a devastating massacre characterized by cruel, indiscriminate killings. For example, "Soldiers descended on the defenseless village, leaving a bloodbath in their wake."

The more figurative meaning is a complete and thorough defeat or an instance of severe loss or failure. For example, "The election became something of a bloodbath for the party, as their opponents claimed 78 of the 80 available seats in Congress."

bloodline

A "bloodline" is the direct line of genetic descent between people or animals, a person's or animal's ancestry or pedigree. For example, "The racehorse hails from a bloodline that has seen dozens of champions throughout the years." By extension, it also means the figurative line of descent characterized by something's predecessors, as for a product. "The operating system's bloodline goes back to the nascent days of home computers."

blood money

"Blood money" means money paid to a hired killer. But it can also mean money gained at the expense or suffering of others, such as money paid to the family of someone who has been murdered. "That settlement is nothing more than blood money. It can't even begin to make up for our father's murder."

And thus begins another feud.

blood moon

A "blood moon" is Earth's moon during a total lunar eclipse, that is, when a full moon is in exact alignment with the Earth and the sun, with Earth in between the two. Light refracted off Earth's atmosphere appears on the moon in a dark-red hue, hence the name "blood moon."

blood oath

A "blood oath" is an oath of loyalty between two or more people, especially one made in a ceremony in which the small cuts made on each person's hand, finger, or arm are pressed together so that their blood can comingle. For example, "Tom and I formed a blood oath swearing that we would both keep the secret of the hidden treasure between us until the day we died."

Such an agreement may also be called "blood pact," and the two participants "blood brothers."

blood in the water

"Blood in the water" is the exposure of a competitive weakness in an opponent that arouses increased competitive aggression in others. The term may have arisen from the fact that the literal presence of blood in water causes aquatic predators (such as sharks) to seek out and attack prey. For example, "After their opponents' star striker left the match with an injury, the home team smelled blood in the water and brought on their attack with everything they had."

A related phrase, "blood in the streets," refers to a situation of violence, unrest, or turmoil, often used to describe a chaotic or dangerous environment.

Yet another construction is "blood on the carpet," which means there is trouble within an organization as a result of a struggle between people or groups.

smell blood

The idiom "smell blood" means to detect weakness or vulnerability in someone or something, often leading to a ruthless or aggressive pursuit of the advantage.

Again, this phrase no doubt arose from the fact that the literal presence of blood in water causes sharks to seek out and attack prey.

draw first blood

To draw first blood means to be the first to gain an advantage or score against an opponent.

Nelson's blood

"Nelson's blood" is nautical slang meaning rum. The phrase refers to British admiral Horatio Nelson, whose corpse was transported to England in a liquor-filled cask.

make one's blood run cold

To "make one's blood run cold" means to cause in someone an intense feeling of fright, horror, or revulsion.

According to the medieval physiological scheme of the four humors in the human body (melancholy, phlegm, blood, and choler), blood was the hot, moist element. Thus, the effect of horror or fear in making the blood cold was to make it unable to fulfil its proper function of supplying the body with vital heat or energy.

That same source also provided us with "make one's blood boil," which means to make someone very angry. And, presumably, very hot.

Flesh

Idioms in brief:
—go the way of all flesh: to die
—in the flesh: physically present
—press the flesh: shake hands and socialize

—thorn in the flesh: a persistent difficulty
—the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak: eager but unable

flesh out

To "flesh out" means to develop something more fully, to provide more details, to amplify. Another version of the phrase is "put flesh on the bones of." For example, "The editor told her to flesh out the story, to put flesh on the bones of the characters."

This metaphoric expression, alluding to clothing a nude body or adding flesh to a skeleton, arose in the mid-1600s.

make someone's flesh creep

To "make someone's flesh creep (or crawl)" is cause that person to have an uncomfortable feeling of fear or disgust, as in, "Cockroaches make my skin crawl." This idiom alludes to the feeling of having something crawl over one's body or skin. The first term appeared in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1727): "Something in their countenance made my flesh creep with a horror I cannot express."

goose flesh

Goose flesh, also known as goose bumps, refers to the small bumps that appear on the skin when a person is cold, scared, or experiencing strong emotions. This reaction is caused by the contraction of tiny muscles at the base of hair follicles.

pound of flesh

If someone demands their "pound of flesh," they insist on getting something they have a right to, even though they might not need it and it will cause problems for the people they are getting it from. It means mercilessly demanding the precise amount owed, no matter how hurtful or difficult the payment is for the debtor.

The term comes from the famous trial scene of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, in which the moneylender Shylock demands the pound of flesh that was promised him as a penalty for non-repayment of the money he loaned to Antonio. He is foiled by Portia, who says he may have his pound of flesh but it may not include an ounce of blood (since no blood is due him). Ever since, this expression has been used as a metaphor for exacting payment, usually in a vengeful way.

muscle

"Muscle" is both a noun and verb associated with strength, power, or the use of physical force. The word comes from Latin *musculus*, diminutive of *mus* meaning mouse, because the appearance of the flexed biceps resembles the back of a mouse.

In addition to biological muscle, like the biceps in your arms, muscle can refer simply to power or authority, as in "We have the muscle to get the job done." Muscle can also refer to a hired thug. In a similar sense, muscle is used as a verb to mean "use force." A bully might muscle someone out of their lunch money, or you might muscle your way through a crowd by pushing people out of your way.

Idioms in brief:
—flex one's muscles: show off one's strength
—muscle car: a high-performance automobile
—muscle in on: intrude forcibly
—musclehead: large, muscular, oafish person
—show muscle: demonstrate one's strength

beer muscles

"Beer muscles" refers to an aggressive attitude that people may exhibit after consuming alcohol, particularly beer. It can also humorously describe a protruding stomach associated with excessive beer consumption. The phrase describes an inflated notion of one's strength, ego, or bravado.

glamor muscle

This slang expression describes a well-defined muscle that can be easily seen, as of the arms, legs, or chest. These muscles are typically associated with bodybuilding and fitness routines focused on creating an attractive physique.

muscle out

"Muscle out" means to force someone to leave a position or place, either through physical strength or by using power, influence, or money to pressure them. It can refer to both literal and figurative situations, such as a person being pushed out of a job or a business being driven out of the market.

Skin

Idioms in brief:

—comfortable in one's own skin: confident

—get under someone's skin: annoy or make angry

—give someone skin: slap palms, like a high five

—have a hide like a rhinoceros: not easily offended

—have a skinful: drunk

—have thin skin: be easily offended or upset

—hit the skins: have sex

—jump out of one's skin: extremely surprised or frightened

—save one's own skin: protect oneself before others

—show some skin: wear revealing clothing

—skin an eel by the tail: do something badly

—skin flick: a pornographic film

—skin game: a fraudulent gambling game; a swindle

brothers/sisters under the skin

The phrase "brothers and sisters under the skin" refers to the idea that all humans share a common humanity, regardless of superficial differences like race, nationality, or beliefs. It emphasizes the shared experiences of joy, pain, and aspiration that connect us all.

In a more immediate sense, it means that people (usually two) have thoughts or feelings in common, despite other obvious differences between them.

let every man skin his own skunk

This proverb tells us that people should be responsible for their own business, especially that which is unfavorable, undesirable, or unpleasant.

Chapter 4 — Bones

(bone, skeleton, joint)

bone

A bone is a rigid organ that is part of the skeleton in most vertebrates. Bones protect the other organs of the body, produce red and white blood cells, store minerals, provide structure and support for the body, and enable mobility.

Bones from slaughtered animals also have many uses for humans. In prehistoric times, they were used to make bone tools, as well for bone carving, important in prehistoric art. They were boiled to make glue, which now is used only for antiques restoration.

Today, bones are used as crafting materials for buttons, beads, handles, bobbins, calculation aids, dice, poker chips, pick-up sticks, arrows, scrimshaw, ornaments, and so on. We still use them to make gelatin, broth, and in stew.

Charred animal bones produce a porous, black, granular material primarily used for filtration and also as a black pigment.

Oracle bone script was a writing system used in ancient China. Its name originates from oracle bones, which were mainly ox clavicles. The Chinese would write their questions on the oracle bone, and burn the bone. Where the bone cracked would be the answer for the questions.

We still use the wishbones of fowl, not for divination, but as a tradition to determine which one of two people pulling on either prong of the bone may make a wish.

Presumably human bones would be as useful as other "animal bones" but we won't go there. What we will do is to list the ways in which bones have influenced the English language.

Idioms in brief:

—bad to the bone: completely immoral

—bare bones: the basic essentials

—blow the joint: leave a place

—bone idle: extremely lazy

—bone in the throat: constant source of frustration

—bone of contention: subject of a dispute

—bone out: leave, depart, flee

—bone-crunching: very fierce, violent, or harsh

—bone-deep: an inherent part of someone

—bone-shaking: violently shaky

—bred in the bone: ingrained, established

—crazy bone: the funny bone

—cut to the bone: cut to bare essentials

—have a bone on: have an erection (a boner)

—have meat on one's bones: not skinny or scrawny

—hop joint: an opium den

—jump one's bones: have sex with one

—make old bones: live to an old age

—prayer bones: knees

—roll the bones: roll dice; take a risk

—skeleton at the feast: a pessimist who dampens the mood

—skin and bones (bag of bones): very thin

—square joint: a term used in building construction

—to the bone: to an extreme degree (chilled to the bone)

bone up on

To "bone up on" means to learn as much as you can about something for a special reason.

The most likely theory about the origin of this phrase is that it derives from the practice of using bones to polish leather. So, to 'bone up' on a subject is to polish or refine one's knowledge.

bone-dry

If something is "bone-dry," it contains no moisture. Bones, when left exposed, quickly lose any residual moisture and become exceedingly dry, particularly under the sun.

The earliest known written example of 'bone dry' comes in a glossary written by the clergyman Robert Forby in 1830. The fun part is that the full title of Forby's work is longer than the citation taken from it — *The Vocabulary Of East Anglia; An Attempt To Record The Vulgar Tongue Of The Twin Sister Counties, Norfolk And Suffolk, As It Existed And Still Exists; With Proof Of Its Antiquity From Etymology And Authority*:

"Bone-Dry, adj. perfectly dry; as dry as a bone long bleached in the weather."

have a bone to pick

If you "have a bone to pick" with someone, it implies that you have an unresolved issue or conflict that you wish to discuss and potentially resolve. Comparable expressions include "have an axe to grind," and "have a score to settle."

The idiom dates back to the 1500s. It was derived from how dogs fought over bones and chewed the meat off them, picking them clean.

rag-and-bone man

A rag-and-bone man is a collector of discarded clothes, bones and other low-value items that can be re-sold to merchants. Cloth was recycled to make shoddy, and bones were used to make glue.

Rag-and-bone men, the poorest of the poor, first made an appearance in early 19th century England. Such a man would drive a horse and cart around the streets calling out for any old discarded items of scrap, clothing or bones that he could resell for a few pennies.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire, rag-and-bone men would collect waste woolen and rag products from householders to sell on to the Shoddy factories. 'Shoddy,' cloth made from recycled wool, was first manufactured in Batley, West Yorkshire, in 1813. The process involved grinding woolen rags into a fibrous mass and mixing this with some fresh wool. Shoddy manufacture was, by the 1860s, a huge industry in West Yorkshire.

In France, when Eugène Poubelle introduced the rubbish bin in 1884, he was criticized by French newspapers for meddling with the ragpickers' livelihood.

sticks and stones may break my bones

'Sticks and stones may break my bones' is a response to an insult, meaning "You might be able to hurt me by physical force but not by insult." It's a stock response to verbal bullying in school playgrounds throughout the English-speaking world.

The full rhyme is usually a variant of:

Sticks and stones may break my bones
But words shall never hurt me.

The rhyme has been used as the title for many albums and songs.

throw someone a bone

To "throw someone a bone" is an attempt to appease or placate someone by giving them something trivial or of minor importance or by doing some small favor for them. It's a reference to giving a dog a bone or scrap to keep it from nagging for food.

close to the bone

"Close to the bone" is used to describe a remark that is penetrating and accurate to the point of causing hurt or discomfort. It often describes jokes or stories that are likely to cause offence because they're near the limit of decency.

like a dog with a bone

To be "like a dog with a bone" is to be stubborn, persistent and unyielding, with determination or single-minded focus on a particular objective.

The idiom is believed to have arisen from the behavior of a dog when it has a bone. The dog generally holds onto it fiercely, and is unwilling to give it up for anyone or anything. It also describes human behavior in many different situations, such as pursuing an ambition, asserting a viewpoint, solving a problem, advocating for a cause.

Similar phrases:
—dog and bone: Cockney rhyming slang for phone
—give a dog a bone: 'give them what they want'
—like a dog in heat: very energetic and enthusiastic

bone factory

"Bone factory" usually refers to a facility that processes animal bones for various uses, such as producing bone meal for animal feed or creating products like gelatin and adhesives. These factories may also manufacture model bones for medical training and education.

But it can also mean a cemetery or a hospital, in which case it might be rephrased as bone orchard or boneyard.

chew the meat and spit out the bones

This colorful phrase means to take in information and to accept what is good

while discarding what is not.

doesn't have a (xxx) bone in one's body

The phrase means that a person completely lacks a specific quality or trait. For example, saying someone doesn't have a dishonest bone in their body implies they are entirely honest.

feel in one's bones

"Feel in one's bones" means to have a strong intuition or belief about something, even if you can't explain why. It suggests a deep, instinctive understanding or feeling about a situation.

This expression, which came into use circa the 1600s, alludes to the age-old notion that persons with a healed broken bone or with arthritis experience bone pain before rain, due to a drop in barometric pressure, and therefore can predict a weather change.

get T-boned

A "T-bone" refers to a type of car accident where one vehicle crashes into the side of another, typically forming a "T" shape at the point of impact. This often occurs at intersections when one driver fails to yield or runs a red light.

have good bones

This phrase is often used to describe a physically well-built person. It's also used to describe a house which has solid structural integrity and a good floor plan that give it a lot of potential for a homebuyer, in spite of other more cosmetic work it might require.

make one's bones

"Make one's bones" is an idiom that means to establish one's reputation or credibility, often through significant achievements or actions. It originally comes from the criminal underworld, where it referred to proving oneself by committing a serious act, such as a murder, to gain respect.

The idiom was popularized in the 1969 book *The Godfather* and its 1972 movie adaptation, for instance when Sonny says "I made my bones when I was nineteen, the last time the family had a war." The term was also used in *The Sopranos* several times.

point the bone at

To "point the bone at" means:
—literally, to cast a spell of death or illness on someone
—to predict ruin, downfall, or failure: "People pointed the bone at him when he presented such wild ideas, but they all proved to be wildly successful."
—to cast blame or aspersions on someone

sawbones

A "sawbones" is a slang term for a physician, especially a surgeon.

In literature, the word is first seen in Charles Dickens's 1837 novel *The Pickwick Papers*. The term arose from the saws that 19th-century surgeons used to perform amputations and quickly became an established part of the English language. Medical technology has improved dramatically since then, but the word 'sawbones' is still used, often in a humorous context.

the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat

The proverb "the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat" means that the final parts of something, or the last moments, are often the best or most desirable. In other words, the closer you get to your goal, the happier you are.

A practical explanation, offered by a poultry producer, says that bones have an impact on heat transmission. Depending on how long you cook it, the meat closer to the bone can be slightly less cooked than the rest of the meat. This can make it a bit more tender and juicier than a boneless product, such as breast.

skeleton key

A skeleton key (also known as a passkey) is a type of master key in which the serrated edge has been removed in such a way that it can open numerous locks. The term derives from the fact that the key has been reduced to its essential parts.

skeleton staff

A skeleton staff is the minimum number of employees needed to operate a business during a vacation, weekend, or other period when people do not

normally work, or full staffing is not necessary.

have a skeleton in the closet

To "have a skeleton in the closet" means to have an embarrassing, unpleasant, damaging, or incriminating secret from you or your family's past that you want kept secret.

This term likens a family secret to a murder victim hidden away in a closet or cupboard. If it ever was based on a real incident, the history has been lost. The metaphor became current in the early 1800s. Thackeray used it in several novels, as did Dickens, George Meredith, and other nineteenth-century British writers, and it remains current.

joint

A joint is a place in the body where two bones meet, allowing for movement, or it can refer to something that connects two parts together. It can also mean:
—a marijuana cigarette
—any disreputable bar, club, or tavern
—a house or casual establishment: a pizza joint
—prison or jail
—a toilet: "I gotta get to the joint fast!"

As a verb, the word means to cut or divide a fowl or piece of meat at a joint.

As an adjective, joint means "combined," like a joint gift to someone that was purchased with money from two or more people.

"Joint" may have come to its present meaning via a very circuitous route that started with the 19th-century American word "joinery," which referred to a specific part of a building. By the early 1800s "joint" had become a building and the rest is history.

case the joint

To "case the joint" means to look around a place in order to find something to steal or to do something else illegal.

This idiom originated in the 1900s from underworld jargon in the US. It has since become a standard phrase used in detective novels and films to describe

the action of scoping out a location before a criminal activity.

"Case" in this phrase is used to mean "watch or observe." It likely comes from an old game called Faro, in which "case" meant a box used to keep track of bets. Over time, this noun became a verb meaning "closely observing."

clip joint

A "clip joint" is a place of entertainment in which customers are tricked into paying far above market prices for low-grade goods or services — or sometimes nothing — in return.

The products and services offered may be illegal, but the establishment has little fear of punishment from law enforcement, since its victims cannot report the venue without admitting that they broke the law. Even when victims have broken no laws, they may be too embarrassed to seek legal recourse.

In the US, clip joints were widespread during the national Prohibition of alcohol from 1920 to 1933, and the practice later became outlawed. Clip joints still operate openly in some areas of the world, where they prey on visiting tourists.

Whether or not any "services" are performed or drinks are ordered has little bearing on the outlandish bill received at the end of the night, listing items like a "hostess fee" or "service charge" that were not originally mentioned to the customer. The arrival of the bill typically corresponds with the arrival of a few large bouncers to ensure payment, sometimes leading the victim to an ATM to retrieve the money.

gyp joint

A "gyp joint" is slang for a business that charges excessive prices, often for low-quality products or services, essentially ripping off customers.

"Gyp" is likely a shortening of "Gypsy," a term once used to refer to the Romani people, who have historically faced prejudicial preconceptions of being untrustworthy.

juice joint

"Juice joint" is a slang term for a soda stand, coined in 1927. It eventually came to refer to any establishment serving beverages, whether they were boozy or not.

out of joint

"Out of joint" means, literally, dislocated, as a bone. Figuratively, it means tumultuous, disordered, improper, or abnormal. For example, "The times are out of joint."

This expression comes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. When the hero learns that he is to avenge his father's murder by his uncle, he says, "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite That ever I was born to set it right."

Chapter 5 — Back

back

Your back is your spine, or the rear part of your whole body. There are dozens and dozens of ways to use the word back, but I'll try and keep it down to a basic dull roar.

"Back" as a noun:
—the backbone or spine
—back part of the human trunk, neck to pelvis
—the corresponding part of an animal
—the rear portion of anything
—support from the rear (back of a couch)
—in sports, a player positioned behind other players
—the reverse side (back of an envelope)
—to have the rear part facing something (the house backs onto a golf course)

"Back" as a verb:
—move in a reverse direction (back the car)
—furnish or strengthen with backing
—provide with financial or moral support
—provide with musical accompaniment
—to bet or wager on
—to substantiate (back an argument with facts)
—to return (give or pay back)
—back away/off/down (withdraw; retreat)
—back out (withdraw before completion)
—back up (of computers, make a copy of files)
—talk/hit back (respond rudely)
—go back on (break a promise)

"Back" as an adverb:
—toward a former location (went back for the class reunion)
—toward a former state (the prince turned back into a frog)
—toward a past time (This story goes back to the 1920s.)
—in a delayed condition (bad weather set the launch date back)

"Back" as an adjective:
—of a past date; not current (back pay)
—situated at the rear (back door)
—backed up (clogged, as a sink)
—backed up (a stream of traffic at a standstill)

Idioms in brief:

—a slap/pat on the back: a sign of praise or approval
—back and fill: keep changing one's mind; shilly shally
—back and forth: to and fro; from side to side
—back in the day: an earlier time, often remembered fondly
—back to back: consecutively; sitting that way
—back to front: in reverse; in disorder
—back to the grind: once again dealing with normal routine
—back-of-the-envelope: a quick, informal calculation
—behind someone's back: doing something secretly
—break one's back: to overwork or work very hard
—break the back of: complete the hardest part of a task
—flat on one's back: incapacitated, especially through illness
—go behind someone's back: do something secretly
—have on one's back: to be burdened with
—lean back: move the upper body backwards and down
—on someone's back: nagging or criticizing someone
—put someone's back up: to annoy someone
—put your back into: devote all your labor and effort to a task
—see the back of: to be rid of
—watch your back: to be cautious

spine

The "spine," also known as the backbone, is a column of bones (vertebrae) that runs down the center of the back, providing support for the body and protecting the spinal cord. It connects different parts of the musculoskeletal system, allowing for flexibility and movement.

Besides being the basic part of a vertebrate's skeleton, a "spine" is also a sharp spike, like the spines on a sea urchin or a cactus. Another kind of spine is the "backbone" of a book, the part of its cover that you can read when the book is on a bookshelf. Spine comes from the Latin *spina*, which also means both "backbone" and "thorn."

Figurative meanings are:
—strength of endurance, determination
—the main support or feature
—strength of character; courage or willpower

have someone's back

To "have someone's back" is to be prepared and willing to support or defend that person.

The phrase originated from military terminology, where soldiers would watch each other's backs during combat. Over time, the expression has evolved to encompass a broader range of situations beyond just warfare.

get one's back up

To "get one's back up" is to become angry or hostile and want to fight or argue.

Often, the term is used in the negative as an admonition, as in "don't get your back up."

The phrase derives from the habit of cats of arching their backs when threatened or annoyed. It is a British colloquial phrase and came into being in the 18th century. It was recorded in *Grose's Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue* (1785).

turn your back on

To "turn your back on" someone or something is to stop being involved, to ignore, reject, or leave. It can also be literal, as in turning so as to face away from someone.

Emerson used it in his famous Transcendentalist poem, *Brahma* (1857): "Find me, and turn thy back on heaven."

have one's back to the wall

To "have one's back to the wall" is to be in a difficult situation where one's resources are limited and one is under pressure or in immediate danger. It suggests that you're in a precarious situation with little room for movement or escape. It's often used for someone in financial straits.

The phrase originated from the American military heritage. Since the 1500's, having organized military units is common. To have its "back to the wall" meant that the unit was in an untenable situation and had to choose between fight or flight. But flight would mean disgrace, so the soldiers usually chose to fight instead.

Some people sit with their backs to the wall for safety's sake, in order to see possible danger approaching.

back of beyond

The "back of beyond" means an extremely remote place. This term, used as a humorous exaggeration, relies on the meaning of beyond (or the beyond) as "a distant place, beyond human experience."

The inland desert region of Australia that is otherwise known as the *Never-Never* is also sometimes called the *Back of Beyond*. The name Never-Never may have been the source of "the Never Never Land" in the play *Peter Pan, or The Boy Who Wouldn't Grow up*, first staged in 1904.

The phrase was first put into print by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *The Antiquary* (1816):
"You… whirled them to the back of beyond to look at the auld Roman camp."

The Scots and Irish dialect version "back o' beyant" is also found in print throughout the 1800s. Scott may have anglicized a rural expression rather than coined it himself — something he did numerous times with other phrases.

back-seat driver

A back-seat driver is someone who gives unwanted and unneeded advice, and sometimes also criticism, sometimes without having the authority or knowledge to do so.

For example, "Aunt Mary drives us crazy with her instructions; she's an incurable back-seat driver." The term originated in the US in the 1920s, when it was first used for a passenger legitimately directing a chauffeur. Soon it was transferred to figurative use.

beast with two backs

Making the "beast with two backs" is a euphemistic metaphor for two persons engaged in sexual intercourse. It refers to the situation in which a couple cling to each other as if a single creature, with their backs facing to the outside.

In English, the expression dates back to at least William Shakespeare's Othello: "I am one, sir, that comes to tell you your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs."

bend over backwards

To "bend over backwards" is to work extra hard to make something happen, particularly to help someone or to make them happy. "He bends over

backwards to please his customers."

The origin of the idiom is in gymnastics. The term was used as early as 920 CE to compare the athletic act of back bending with an expenditure of effort to ensure that something went as planned.

have a target on your back

To "have a target on one's back" means to be the focus of someone's anger, to be singled out as someone to persecute, or to be identified as someone's main rival.

For instance, making a serious error at work may put a target on your back. This means the boss will watch you carefully to see if you make other mistakes; he may have already made up his mind that he will fire you and simply wants an excuse. Having a target on one's back means that you are subjected to closer scrutiny than usual.

if you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours

This phrase comes from the Latin *quid pro quo*, which means "something for something." Using the term tells someone that if they help you, you will help them.

It is first found in print in the USA in *Artemus Ward, His Book*, written by American humorist Charles Farrar Browne (1834-1867). Artemus Ward, portrayed as an illiterate rube with Yankee common sense, appeared in a series in 1858, which achieved great popularity in both the US and Britain.

knock back

The idiom "knock back" has the following meanings:
—to reject or discourage a person: "He applied for funding for nine different projects and was knocked back each time."
—to drink something, usually an alcoholic beverage, quickly: "Let's get together and knock back some cold ones tonight."
—to physically force someone or something backwards: "The rumbling of the earthquake knocked us all back."
—to cost someone a particular amount of money: "How much is this car repair going to knock me back?"

Monday morning quarterback

In American football, a quarterback is the player who directs the team's offense on the field. A "Monday morning quarterback" is a person who passes

judgement on something or criticizes it when it is too late for their comments to be of any use, since the particular game or project in question has finished.

You might say "shoulda, woulda, coulda."

The term originated in the 1930s when football as a spectator sport was seen mostly on weekends. Office discussions of the previous weekend's game would often be dominated by one or more "experts" who "revised" the quarterback's instructions to the offense so as to achieve superior results. In print, the term appeared in Barry Wood's *What Price Football* (1932), in which he applied it to sportswriters who were not content with reporting the game but felt they had to analyze it. In succeeding decades it was transferred to anyone second-guessing any past decision.

Monday morning quarterbacks are common in bridge games, too.

no skin off my back

If you say something is "no skin off my back," you're saying it isn't important to you.

The expression may have come from the old Royal Navy, where you could be flogged for major and minor crimes. If you weren't the one being flogged, it meant you wouldn't lose any skin off your back.

It could also have originated from working-class people in the UK, during the early 20th century. Coal miners often bruised their backs during work, crawling in low mineshafts, which practically "took the skin off their backs."

In the US, the term is most commonly used as "no skin off my nose," but "no skin off me" and "no skin off my bugle" also exist.

on the back burner

If something is "on the back burner," it's been deliberately put aside so more important or urgent things can be taken care of.

The phrase alludes to putting a pot that needs little attention on a back burner of a stove, leaving space on the front burners for pots that need to be stirred.

The North American expression "cook on the front burner" means to be on the way to rapid success.

on the back foot

If someone is "on the back foot," they are at a disadvantage, outmaneuvered,

outclassed, or in retreat. "From now on, Labor will be on the back foot on the subject of welfare."

The source may be boxing, where being "on the back foot" means that the fighter is in a defensive position, rather than the more aggressive offensive stance. It's also possible that the phrase comes from cricket, where "on the back foot" suggests that a player is protecting his territory.

The phrase is somewhat similar to "backpedaling," which clearly implies a hasty retreat.

piggyback

The word "piggyback" means:
—a ride on someone's back or shoulders
—hauling truck trailers on railroad flatcars
—an extra load carried into space by a vehicle (such as a spacecraft)
—any person or process that is carried along by another

"Piggyback" began its life as two words and has never had anything to do with pigs. The earliest forms were the medieval "pick back" and "pick pack," effectively the same expression. These are cited within a year of each other in the 1560s, both in essays on religious themes.

The common "pick" part of these derives from "pitching," either in the sense of "placing," as in pitching a tent or "throwing," as with a pitchfork. 'Pick' is the load and 'back' is the place it is carried.

"Piggyback" seems to be no more than a misstating or misspelling of the earlier forms of the phrase.

One could say that it came to have something to do with pigs in 1843, in Baynard Rush Hall's *The new purchase: or, Early years in the far West*, in which Hall recounts a tale of a group of rowdies playing at racing with pigs carried on their back.

take a back seat

Literally, "take a back seat" alludes simply to the back seats of a coach, a theater, a gaming table, etc., being less prominent than the others.

Used in the figurative sense, it means to willingly take a less prominent role in some situation.

The phrase first appeared in the mid-1800s, when it was popularized by

William Makepeace Thackeray's novel *Vanity Fair*. These days, it's a phrase used in many songs, for example, in the band Queen's *Crazy Little Thing Called Love.*

stab someone in the back

To "stab someone in the back" is to betray that person, to do something harmful to someone who trusted you.

The term originated in Germany just after World War I. The German army felt that they had been betrayed by the politicians who signed The Treaty of Versailles. It was clear by this point that their defeat was inevitable, but they did not believe this and blamed the politicians for their loss. Later, the story was perpetuated by Adolf Hitler when he was rising to power. He used this "stabbed in the back" story to gain followers. Even though an inquiry proved that the story was not true, it became a part of German history.

spine-tingling

Emotions that send chills down your spine are intense emotions like excitement, exhilaration, nervousness, and fear.

You're sitting on your couch in the dark alone, watching a scary movie. The killer is walking toward an unsuspecting victim, then suddenly jumps out at her. In that moment, the hairs on your body stand up, and you get a shiver down your spine. Again, when the music swells during your favorite song, you get the shivers, this time with the little goosebumps on your arms.

There's a good reason for spine-tingling, shivers, and goosebumps. These are your body's responses to emotion or stress, controlled by the part of the brain called the hypothalamus.

When we feel things like love, fear, or sadness, the hypothalamus sends a signal to our bodies that produces adrenaline in our blood. The signal triggers the arrector pili muscles to contract, and then we have goosebumps. The sudden adrenaline rush may also cause sweaty palms, tears, increased blood pressure, or shivers.

a monkey on your back

Having a "monkey on your back" means dealing with a persistent problem or burden that is difficult to get rid of, often associated with emotions or addiction. It describes a situation that causes ongoing unhappiness or stress.

"His boss was a constant monkey on his back, checking every move he

made."

The earliest recording of this idiom in print dates to the mid-1800s when the *Glossary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases* noted that a child was said to have the monkey on its back when in ill humor or out of temper.

The roots of the idiom may lie in Aesop's fable, *The Ape and the Dolphin*, about a monkey riding on a dolphin's back. In the story, the dolphin initially mistook the monkey for a man and helped it. Later, the dolphin realized he was carrying a monkey and had to find a way to remove it.

Another potential origin for this idiom is its association with the devil. Throughout history, monkeys have been linked to evil forces, including devils, possibly due to their distorted resemblance to humans.

Then, there's *Arabian Nights*, where Sinbad the Sailor carries on his back an apelike creature that refuses to dismount, symbolizing an inescapable burden.

It is worth noting that in Eastern symbolism, the monkey symbolizes a distracted mind, which aligns with the idiom's concept due to the monkey's incessant chatter.

By the early 20th century, the idiom evolved to describe drug addiction, particularly heroin. This metaphor likened the relentless grip of addiction to a monkey clinging to one's back, an image that resonated with the struggles of those afflicted.

the back of one's hand

"The back of one's hand" has three meanings.

First, it's a rejection, snub, or rebuke, a display of contempt or scorn for someone or something. For example, "I give the back of my hand to anyone who says I'm not a good parent."

Second, the term is used to represent one's complete knowledge of or familiarity with something. For example, "I've read this book so many times, I know it like the back of my hand."

Third, "back of the hand" can mean an insult in the term "back-handed compliment."

hold back

To "hold back" is to be in a state of restraint or retention, such as to hold back tears or to hold back salary.

Below are six different ways that the idiom is used.
1. To physically restrain someone or something. "Barriers held the crowd back."

2. To refrain from doing something to the fullest extent that one can. "No need to hold back now, winter! My new coat can withstand your blizzards!"

3. To obstruct someone or something. "The levee is holding back the floodwaters, for now."

4. To keep something in one's possession. "I held back some of the money, so we still have some cash left."

5. To withhold something or wait before acting. "Hold these pink cupcakes back for now—there are more than enough already on the table."

6. To require a student to repeat a grade of school. "We may have to hold you back a year if you don't pass this test."

Chapter 6 — Brain Box

(head)

head

The head is the upper part of the body in humans and many other animals, containing the brain, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. It serves as the center for sensory functions and is also the seat of the faculty of reason, meaning intelligence, intellect, or mind.

The head more or less runs the show since we use it for reacting, thinking, speaking, breathing, and eating. As a consequence, very many idioms have arisen using the word.

There are also many insults based on "head": airhead, bananahead, bean head, beef-head, blockhead, bonehead, bubblehead, deadhead, dough head, dumbhead, meathead, soft in the head, fathead, have rocks in one's head, knothead, mushhead, peanut head, potato head, pudding-head, and pighead.

Idioms in brief:

—a cool head: able to remain calm

—a head-scratcher: a difficult problem

—a kick in the head: a devastating failure

—a light bulb goes off in one's head: sudden insight

—a/per head: for each person

—able to do something standing on one's head: very adept

—above one's head: too difficult to understand

—acidhead: someone who takes LSD

—all in your head: not real, imaginary

—bang heads together: force people to behave

—basehead: cocaine addict

—be on one's own head: own the responsibility or blame

—bite someone's head off: snap at them

—butt heads: engage in conflict

—call for someone's head: demand they be punished

—cooler heads will prevail: calm people triumph in the end

—cop a head: become intoxicated

—eyes popping out of one's head: looking very surprised

—gearhead/ motorhead: one knowledgeable about cars

—get into your head: understand
—get one's head handed to one: suffer defeat
—get one's head together: organize one's thoughts
—get someone or something out of one's head: forget
—get something through someone's head: teach them
—get your head down: hide, concentrate, or take a nap
—give one a heads up: a preliminary alert
—give somebody their head: give them freedom
—give your head a shake: you're being silly
—go soak your head!: go away!
—hang your head: ashamed, embarrassed
—hardheaded: practical and realistic
—have a big head: be conceited or arrogant
—have a clear head: be sober and rational
—have a head like a sieve: forget things easily
—have someone's blood on your head: kill someone
—have windmills in one's head: be lost in dreams
—have your head screwed on straight: practical and wise
—hay head: marijuana user
—head and shoulders above: clearly superior
—head back: return
—head cook and bottle washer: in charge of everything
—head count: the number of people counted
—head doctor: psychiatrist
—head for the hills: flee, seek refuge
—head for the last roundup: die
—head for: move toward
—head in: prepare to enter, return
—head of the class: top student
—head on: directly, facing forward
—head out: leave
—head the bill: be a star performer
—headbanger: a fan of heavy metal music
—headlock: a wrestling hold
—headstrong: willful, determined, obstinate

—heap scorn on one's head: speak of one with contempt
—hold a gun to someone's head: pressure with threats
—hold up your head: display confidence and pride
—hot-headed: fiery, hasty, impetuous
—in over your head: too difficult to deal with
—keep one's head on a swivel: stay alert
—keep your head up: be confident and proud.
—keep your head: stay calm; think clearly
—knock it on the head: prevent from happening
—lay our heads together: collaborate
—level-headed: calm and competent
—love-tooth in the head: constant yearning for love
—mad as a bear with a sore head: very angry
—make head against: physically fight something
—make headway: be successful
—make one's head spin: make one feel confused or dizzy
—make one's head swim: be dazed or bewildered
—metalhead: a fan of heavy metal music
—not know one's head from a hole in the ground: ignorant
—not know one's head from one's tail: exceptionally stupid
—off one's head: insane or eccentric
—one's head on a plate: harsh punishment
—petrol head: enthusiastic about cars
—pissed out of one's head: extremely drunk
—pointy-headed: annoyingly intellectual
—pothead: someone who smokes marijuana
—put one's head into the lion's mouth: get into trouble
—put your head in a noose: put yourself in danger
—rear its ugly head: unwelcome appearance
—should have your head examined: be irrational
—sleepyhead: a very tired person
—speedhead: addicted to amphetamines
—stop ironing my head: stop irritating me
—talk through the back of one's head: talk nonsense
—thickheaded: stupid, ignorant, stubborn

—went over my head: I didn't understand

—wet the baby's head: celebrate its birth with a drink

—win by a head: win by a very narrow margin

—wrap one's head around: understand or accept

heady

The word "heady" has several meanings:

—domineering: too heady to reason with
—exhilarating: the heady news of triumph
—impetuous: a heady outburst of anger
—intelligent and prudent: heady tactics
—intoxicating or stupefying: heady liqueur
—suffering from a headache: heady, throbbing
—swift and violent: headlong

head to head

"Head to head" means in direct confrontation or conflict at close quarters, as in "The two brothers went at it head-to-head." It can also mean things arranged in a line with the heads adjacent to each other. "The bunk beds were set up head-to-head."

off the top of one's head

To say something "off the top of one's head" means saying it from memory or without much or careful consideration. Such speeches are made extemporaneously, in an impromptu manner, without having precise knowledge or without careful thought.

have your head in the clouds

Having your head in the clouds means being absentminded, impractical, aloof, dreamy, or unaware of what's going on. "He's always got his head in the clouds — he makes all these impossible plans."

The earliest use of this expression dates back to the mid-1600s. There were no airplanes then, so clouds were considered out of reach. Thus, when a person talked about impossible or stupid things, people would say that his head was in the clouds.

go over someone's head

This phrase usually means to speak to someone who has more authority (higher in rank) than the person to whom you would normally go in that situation.

It can also mean that something is too difficult for someone to understand. "My explanation went completely over his head."

get in over your head

To "get in over your head" means to become deeply involved in a situation which is too difficult for you to deal with, or cannot get out of. It means not able to cope any longer.

The idiom traces its origins to the notion of being submerged in water that's over your head and you're unable to swim. This emerged in the English language during the 1600s.

keep your head above water

Literally, this means to hold one's head out of the water so as to avoid drowning. Figuratively, it means to survive financial or other problems. "Despite the recession, they kept their heads above water."

keep your head down

To "keep your head down" means to try not to be noticed or to get involved in something.

Literally, it means that in a war, you want to keep your head down so enemy bullets pass over you. Figuratively, if you suspect your boss or other authority figure is angry, you really don't want to draw attention to yourself, so you would avoid the boss and avoid doing anything that makes the boss notice you.

lose your head

To lose your head means to become so agitated that you lose control and cannot act sensibly. This expression, which at one time meant literal decapitation and was then used figuratively from the mid-1800s on, differs from the more recent catchphrase. "You'd lose your head if it wasn't screwed on," is addressed to an extremely absentminded person.

use your head

This means to use your own intelligence and intellectual ability, to think

logically and rationally. In this phrase, "head" refers to one's brain. It's often said to someone as an imperative. This usage dates from the late 1300s.

from head to toe

"From head to toe" means encompassing one's entire body from top to bottom. It typically refers to how one is dressed and groomed. The more alliterative "head to heels" originated about 1400, and Shakespeare had "from top to toe" in Hamlet.

head on the chopping block

To have one’s head on the chopping block means to be in danger of being fired or singled out for criticism. The phrase is also used to describe a plan or a system about to be discarded or done away with.

The idiom is derived from the practice of executing criminals by severing their heads from their bodies with an axe or a sword. The condemned would lay his head on a block of wood and stretch his neck so the executioner could sever his head from his body. Henry VIII of England was famous for executing two of his wives in this manner, sending to France for a professional executioner who would get the job done cleanly and quickly.

head someone off at the pass

Literally, to "head someone off at the pass" means to prevent someone or something from reaching or passing a certain point, especially to escape.

This phrase is a common trope in pursuing villains in Western movies. It means, not to follow them outright, but to circle around to a mountain pass that the fugitives must traverse and corner them there. The exact origin of the phrase is unknown, but the strategy of heading someone off at the pass as a military tactic has been in use since ancient times.

get a head start

To get a head start means getting an advantage over other people in something such as a competition or race. It can also mean a promising beginning in any venture. Depending on the situation, a head start may be inherent, obtained by special privilege, earned through one's accomplishments, or granted mercifully by an opponent.

head-on

"Head-on" means in open conflict, or in direct opposition. It can also mean to

deal with a difficult problem directly, bravely, and with determination; to face a situation squarely, rather than avoiding it. This phrase originated from everyday use in American traffic situations. When two cars ram into each other in an accident, it is said that there has been a head-on collision.

heads i win, tails you lose

The phrase "heads I win, tails you lose" is often used to describe a situation in which one party has an unfair advantage or in which the outcome is rigged in their favor. It means that no matter what the outcome of a particular decision or event, the person who uses this phrase will come out on top.

heads up

This phrase has several meanings. First, it's often heard as an advance warning and is usually spelled as "heads-up." For example, "Ardon gave me a heads-up about a possible bridge game tonight." This meaning is a modification of an earlier meaning of "Watch out! Be careful!"

Second, it can mean being wide awake and alert, as in "The students all had their heads up, entranced by the video."

Third, the phrase can mean being the head of an organization or a project. "She heads up the whole company."

And fourth, it means a type of display screen. Heads-up (or head up) display screens began to be used in aircraft in the 1960s. These project images and information on to the aircraft windscreen and can be viewed by the pilot while still keeping half an eye on the flightpath ahead—so long as his head is up, of course.

heads will roll

"Heads will roll" is a prediction that people will be dismissed, or forced to resign, or punished severely. The phrase came about, of course, as an allusion to decapitated heads rolling after execution by guillotine or axe.

The earliest example in print appears to be in the US newspaper *The Indiana Herald*, January 1858:

"Let it [the Lecompton Constitution] be treated as the people of England treated the tyrannous rescripts of the Stuarts... Your friends in office will be led to the block. Let them go! Their official heads will roll on the ground. Let them roll!"

Many people believe the phrase was first uttered by Adolf Hitler. He did

indeed make such a threat, which was widely reported in British and American newspapers, as in this citation from the English publication *The Daily Herald*, September 1930:

"Giving evidence, Hitler declared… 'If our movement is victorious there will be a revolutionary tribunal which will punish the crimes of November 1918. Then decapitated heads will roll in the sand.'"

Though Hitler didn't coin the phrase, his use of 'heads will roll in the sand' in a widely reported speech gave the impetus for the phrase to become commonplace in the 1940s and beyond.

headwind

A "headwind" is a wind having the opposite general direction to a course of movement (as of an aircraft or ship). It can also mean a force or influence that inhibits progress. On the opposite side of things, a tailwind is a wind that blows in the direction of travel of an object.

bang your head against a brick wall

To "bang your head against a brick wall" is to attempt, continuously and fruitlessly, to accomplish some task or achieve some goal that is or seems ultimately hopeless. In other words, it means to waste effort on a futile project.

uneasy lies the head that wears the crown

This expression means that a person with great power, such as a king, is constantly apprehensive because he suffers the largest amount of stress, anxiety, doubt, and worry.

The phrase comes from Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, in which Henry is bemoaning his position as king in that he, unlike even the most humble cabin-boy, cannot find a moment's peace and repose.

need like a hole in the head

If you say that you need something like a hole in the head, you are emphasizing that you have neither a need nor a desire for it, as in "I needed that extra work like I need a hole in the head."

This is said to be a translation of a Yiddish expression. It became more widely known following the play *A Hole in the Head* (1957) by Arnold Schulman, and a film of the same name starring Frank Sinatra (1959).

drum something into someone's head

To drum something into someone's head means to force an idea on someone by means of persistent repetition. This expression, used since the early 1800s, alludes to performing drumbeats over and over. John Stuart Mill used it in his Political Economy (1848): "This doctrine has been … tolerably effectively drummed into the public mind."

have a good head on your shoulders

To have a good head on your shoulders means you're intelligent, shrewd, have good sense or good judgment, and able to make good decisions. This term originated in the 1500s as "have an old head on young shoulders," alluding to the wisdom of age and physical youth. It took its present form in the 1800s.

something hanging over your head

To have something hanging over your head is when you're constantly worried or stressed about something, such as an upcoming obligation or event. "I've got those darn credit card bills hanging over my head."

off with his head!

"Off with his head!" is a command for someone to be punished to the utmost. It's an imitation of an order that might have been given by a monarch or other ruler in medieval times to have someone literally beheaded. The phrase is often used humorously.

Shakespeare used the phrase many times in his plays and Lewis Carroll used it in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (published 1865), The Queen of Hearts shrieks the phrase several times in the story.

one's head off

This phrase means very loudly or without restraint. For example, "He is shy at first, but will talk your head off once you get to know him." Another sample: "They will be laughing their heads off when they see my costume."

to head off

The idiom "to head off" has three meanings.
—to depart for some destination: "She's heading off to New York City next week."
—to divert someone or something: "Try to head them off before they get home."

—to block something: "The town headed off the attempt to build another mall."

ahead of the curve

"Ahead of the curve" means at the forefront of or leading in something, such as a developing situation, field of study, and so on. It can mean to be one of the first to change to a new idea or way of doing something that later becomes generally popular: setting trends, rather than just keeping up with them. It means, in terms of intelligence, better than average.

at loggerheads

If you're at loggerheads with someone, you strongly disagree with them about something.

Originally, a 'logger-head' was literally a 'block-head.' A logger was a thick block of timber which was fastened to a horse's leg to prevent it from running away. In the 1600s, a loggerhead was also recorded as an iron instrument with a long handle used for melting pitch and for heating liquids. It is likely that the use of these tools as weapons gave rise to the idea of saying that rivals were 'at loggerheads.'

"Loggerhead" is also the name of a sea turtle and a shrike, a passerine bird.

cash on the barrelhead

If you pay cash on the barrelhead for something, you pay for it immediately and in cash.

The lexicographer Charles Earle Funk surmised that this term originated in the days when upended barrels served as both seats and tables in bars, and customers were required to pay for their drinks immediately, literally putting their money on the top (head) of a barrel.

In nineteenth-century America, barrel was slang for money, especially for a slush fund provided for a political candidate, and a barrel of money signified a huge fortune.

two heads are better than one

The advice of a second person can be very useful. The idea is ancient, and the expression was already a proverb in John Heywood's 1546 collection, *A Dialogue conteinyng the nomber in effect of all the Prouerbes in the Englishe tongue*, 1546.

It is now more of a corporate phrase wherein people use it in terms of group projects and assignments for people.

like a deer in the headlights

To be "like a deer in the headlights" is to have a stunned or glazed expression because you're caught n a state of paralyzing surprise, fear, or bewilderment. This phrase refers to the tendency of deer to freeze in place in front of an oncoming vehicle.

A similar phrase is "caught like a rabbit in the 'headlights," used to describe somebody who appears so frightened that they cannot think clearly and do not know what to do or say.

on your own head be it

This phrase is said to warn someone that they are responsible for something that they intend to do and for something that happens as a consequence. It is usually used when someone is about to say or do something which you think is unwise.

come to a head

If a problem or disagreement comes to a head, it becomes so bad that you have to take action to deal with it. "Matters came to a head on Monday when he threatened to resign."

You can also say that a particular event or fact brings a problem or disagreement to a head. For example, "The crisis is believed to have been brought to a head by demands from the bank."

This expression may refer to farmers waiting for lettuce or cabbage leaves to grow together and form a head. Alternatively, the reference may be to a boil (a painful lump on the skin) forming a head (the white part in the middle) just before it bursts.

do someone's head in

To "do someone's head in" means to make someone feel confused, unhappy, bewildered, or annoyed. "Getting up at four o'clock every morning was doing my head in."

don't worry your pretty little head

This phrase is used to tell someone (usually female) not to worry, and is offensive because it suggests the person is not intelligent enough to understand something.

a fish rots from the head down

This proverb means that when an organization or state fails, it is the leadership that is the root cause. The original phrase was, "a fish stinks from the head down."

The term may have originated with the Turks. Sir James Porter's *Observations on the religion, law, government, and manners of the Turks*, 1768, includes this: "The Turks have a homely proverb applied on such occasions: they say "the fish stinks first at the head," meaning, that if the servant is disorderly, it is because the master is so."

The phrase appears to have been used in Turkey in a metaphorical rather than literal sense from the outset. That's just as well because, in reality, it is the guts of fish that rot and stink before the head.

go and boil your head

"Go and boil your head" is an insult meaning to go and do something bad to yourself. It's a disrespectful expression of scorn or disdain. Similar expressions are "get lost" and "go and play in the traffic."

The original meaning of the phrase was rather milder than it is now and meant "stop promoting silly opinions" or "don't be so stupid. "

go to your head

If something that you have achieved goes to your head, it makes you proud and inclined to become arrogant. It can also mean to cause one to feel dizzy or tipsy, usually from alcohol.

headfirst

"Headfirst" describes a dive or a movement that leads with the head. You can also use headfirst in a more figurative way, to describe something that's done impulsively, or in a reckless, brash, or hasty manner: "He plunged headfirst into this new relationship two days after breaking up with his girlfriend."

have a head for something

To "have a head for something" means to have the mental ability to do

something well or to understand or deal with. It can also mean having the ability to withstand or endure something. For example, "Working on bridges doesn't bother him. He has a head for heights."

head honcho

A "head honcho" is the person in charge, or the highest-ranking person in an organization. The word honcho comes from the Japanese word *hanchō* meaning "leader of the squad, section, group." It found its way into American military argot in the mid-1950s, though it is known that the Japanese applied *hanchō* to British or Australian officers in charge of work parties in prisoner-of-war camps.

headhunting

Headhunting, also known as executive search, is the process of recruiting and hiring highly skilled and experienced professionals for senior-level positions within an organization.

The term refers to the practice of hunting a human and collecting the severed head after killing the victim. Headhunting was practiced in historic times in many parts of the world. The primary function was ritual and ceremonial. Some experts theorize that the practice stemmed from the belief that the head contained "soul matter" or life force, which could be harnessed through its capture.

head of the household

The "head of the household" is the person in the house who is responsible for making decisions and earning money.

A household consists of one or more persons who live in the same dwelling. The household is the basic unit of analysis in many social, microeconomic and government models, and is important to economics and inheritance. In feudal societies, the royal household and medieval households of the wealthy included servants and other retainers.

loaf of bread

"Loaf of bread" is Cockney rhyming slang for head. "Use yer loaf!"

"Use your loaf" is the injunction often heard when someone is particularly slow in following orders. But this phrase, in its finer meanings, says: "Use your common sense. Interpret orders according to the situation as you find it, and don't follow the book of words too literally."

a price on someone's head

A "price on someone's head" is a monetary reward for capturing or killing someone, usually someone guilty of a crime. The "head" in this term presumably alludes to the older punishment of beheading. [Mid-1700s]

propeller-head

Literally, this term refers to the central part of a propeller, into which the blades fit. Figuratively, it means an enthusiast of technology and especially of computers, a technophile. The phrase arose from the small propeller on top of the beanie often worn by caricatures of scientifically knowledgeable persons in popular culture.

put your head above the parapet

This idiom means to be brave enough to do or say something one thinks is important even though it may have bad results. Parapets are banks of earth or walls which soldiers build for protection against enemy attacks.

stand something on its head

To "stand something on its head" is to misinterpret or misrepresent something so that it is completely incorrect or the opposite of what it should be. "You just stood your previous statement on its head, and now you're contradicting yourself."

The idiom can also mean to innovate or alter something, such as a field or activity, in an unexpected or unprecedented way.

talking head

A "talking head" is the image of a person, usually with only the head and upper body visible, talking to the camera, as in a documentary, news show, or similar work. More specifically, it means a pundit who discusses issues of the day, especially one on TV.

a rush of blood to the head

"A rush of blood to the head" refers to a sudden attack of wild irrationality in your thinking or actions, leading to impulsive or reckless acts without clear thinking.

better be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion

This proverb means that it is better to be the leader of a less prestigious group than to be a subordinate in a more prestigious one. A similar phrase is "a big frog in a small pond." It often implies that the person may not have as much clout in "a bigger pond," i.e., a larger group or arena of some kind.

deadhead

Deadhead has several meanings:
—a person who uses a free ticket for admittance, accommodation, or entertainment
—a vehicle that transports no passengers or freight during a trip
—a dull or stupid person
—a log or tree trunk that is partially submerged or just beneath the surface
—to remove dead or withered flowers from a plant

Capitalize that first "d" and you get:
—Deadhead: a devoted fan of the rock group *The Grateful Dead*.

egghead

The word egghead is an epithet used to refer to intellectuals or people considered out-of-touch with ordinary people and lacking in realism and common sense on account of their intellectual interests. College libraries are full of eggheads, academics who are researching and writing and thinking about their scholarly pursuits. The word originally meant "bald person," but it came to mean "smart person" in Chicago-area slang, particularly among newspaper reporters around 1918.

full speed ahead

"Full speed ahead" means as fast and as strongly as possible. For example, "There's only one way we'll get there on time, so go full speed ahead." A similar phrase is "full steam ahead." These expressions allude to the steam engine, where full steam signifies that a boiler has developed maximum pressure. They became well known through an order allegedly given by Admiral David Farragut at the battle of Mobile Bay (1864): "Damn the torpedoes! Full steam ahead!"

headcanon

"Headcanon" is a word used in film/television/comics/etc. fandom that refers to something a fan imagines about the characters (such as a scenario or relationship) but that doesn't appear on screen or on the page. An example might be: "In my headcanon, Jar Jar Binks is the ultimate villain who

orchestrated the downfall of the Jedi."

As books and movies are made into sequels and franchises, it can be fun to keep track of how characters grow and change, how their timelines intersect, who is related to whom, and all that. In spite of everything that is explained in a book or on a screen, there is often the urge to imagine aspects of beloved characters beyond what is seen or read. That's part of being a fan. We want to read deeply and analyze even the smallest detail of every character, and sometimes make up what we don't know, all as a way to celebrate our love for the characters with other fans.

The two terms, canon and headcanon, are separated by about 900 years of use. Canon originated in the church, dating from before the 12th century. In its earliest English use, the term referred to regulation or dogma decreed by a church council. Also in contexts of religion, canon refers to the texts that religious authorities regard as scripture.

In literary studies, the meaning of canon has broadened to encompass the works of a writer or any group of writings considered as sanctioned or accepted within a circle. The books and writers that are considered as belonging to the canon are almost always the subject of argument and tend to change with the times. In *The Western Canon* (1994), for example, the literary critic Howard Bloom identified 26 writers that he felt were central to western intellectual and artistic thought, from William Shakespeare to Samuel Beckett and including writers such as Jane Austen, Miguel de Cervantes, and Franz Kafka.

The idea of canon as a term for what is codified by a text is often attributed to Ronald A. Knox, an English Catholic priest who, in addition to his writings on Christianity, wrote detective fiction and contributed many writings of literary analysis on Sherlock Holmes. However, there is no evidence that Knox himself used the term. Arthur Conan Doyle's Holmes stories, published in periodicals, became a canonical universe because they offered reliably consistent information about the characters across different episodic arcs.

As fans of the detective later wrote their own stories, canon became a useful term for distinguishing the information that Conan Doyle provided in the stories from that which was inserted by someone else into the Holmes universe.

Since the idea of canon is critical to fan lore, it's understandable that a distinguishing term has emerged for those ideas we have about a character that is not supported by the text or film in which the character appears. And so we have headcanon.

Headcanon refers to something that a fan imagines to be true about a character even though no information supporting that belief is spelled out in the text. Sometimes that involves filling in your own explanation for a character's strange motivation, or projecting aspects onto a character that make them more relatable to you. If you choose to believe, for example, that Dumbledore and the Weasleys are evil conspirators, then you've created a headcanon—essentially, a canon that exists only in your head.

Another term, fanon (a portmanteau of fan and canon) applies when someone's headcanon is shared with and becomes widely accepted by members of a fan community.

head trip

A "head trip" refers to an experience that is intellectually stimulating or challenging, often leading to a deeper exploration of one's thoughts and emotions. It can also describe a disorienting or exciting experience, sometimes associated with the use of psychoactive substances.

turn one's head

"Turn one's head" means to attract someone's attention or to cause someone to become infatuated or conceited. For example, "He's a pretty mediocre writer, but getting published in that literary journal seems to have turned his head." It can also refer to ignoring something uncomfortable or undesirable

Chapter 7 — Brain Fur

(hair)

hair

A hair is one of the fine strands that grow from the skin of humans and other mammals. It provides insulation against the cold in most mammals. Specialized hairs, such as porcupine quills, provide protection.

Hair is dead. A good shampoo can make your hair more manageable, but it can't make your hair less dead. Any advertisement that claims a shampoo can nourish or revitalize your hair is, in effect, promising to feed and raise the dead. *(Imponderables, David Feldman, 1986)*

We spend an inordinate amount of time playing with our hair, making rules about it, wearing it in different styles for a great variety of reasons, and worrying about it. Regular hairdressing in some cultures is considered a sign of wealth or status. So, it's not surprising that there are many idioms attached to the word.

Idioms in brief:

—have a hair across one's ass: be intensely annoyed

—a hair in the butter: a challenging situation

—angel hair: very fine spaghetti

—blue-hair: an old woman

—come within a hair of: very nearly obtain

—curl one's hair: shock or terrify

—hair-raising: terrifying

—hang in there like a hair in a biscuit: persistent

—have straws in one's hair: insane

—take a haircut: accept an investment loss

—tear your hair out: react with extreme agitation

as fine as frog's hair

This phrase was reportedly first seen in C. Davis's *Diary of 1865*. It has become a silly, ironic way to say you're feeling fresh or dandy. Frogs don't have hair, or the hair they have is barely noticeable, so to be finer than something that fine is to be very fine indeed.

"How are you this morning, MaryAnn?"

"Why I'm as fine as frog's hair, Beauchamp!"

bad hair day

Literally, a "bad hair day" is a day when one's appearance, especially one's hair, does not look attractive. Figuratively, a "bad hair day" is one when everything seems to go wrong.

Originating as a humorous statement, this term was soon broadened to mean simply having a bad day. The phrase came into prominence in the language following its use in the 1992 film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer.*

by the short hairs

To have someone "by the short hairs" or "by the short and curlies" means to completely control, dominate, or hold power over them, especially in a difficult or awkward situation. The original reference was to the hairs on the back of one's neck, though it is now usually assumed that the phrase refers to pubic hairs. It is, in effect, a euphemism for having someone by the balls.

The "short and curlies" variant originated as military slang and is first recorded in Eric Partridge's A dictionary of forces' slang 1939–45, (1948).

not turn a hair

To "not turn a hair" means to avoid becoming afraid or upset, to remain calm and show no emotion when you are told something bad or when something bad happens. "She didn't turn a hair during the bank robbery."

This term comes from horse racing. After a race, a horse often has roughened, outward-turned hair, thus all its hair has "turned." The figurative use, nearly always in the negative, dates from the late 1800s.

get in your hair

If someone gets in your hair, they're annoying you, usually by being present all the time. The allusion here may well be to head lice but that is not known for certain. Presumably it was already in common use by the time Mark Twain wrote, "You'll have one of these … old professors in your hair." (*A Tramp Abroad*, 1880).

get out of your hair

If someone "gets out of your hair," they stop bothering or annoying you. The origin of the phrase is unknown, but is thought to date to the mid 1900s.

The phrase may refer to the uncomfortable feeling of having some foreign object in one's hair, such as a bat, or a twig, or perhaps cobwebs. People don't like having anything in their hair that irritates them, so someone might say "I'll get out of your hair" if they feel like they are being a nuisance.

There was a song called *Get out of my hair* released by the American singer Hasley in 2017. The phrase has also been used in literary works, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* by J.K. Rowling.

hair of the dog that bit you

To take the "hair of the dog that bit you" means to drink more alcohol to counteract the effects of a hangover.

Most ancient civilizations and many modern ones believed that the most effective cure for a dog bite was a bundle of the canine's hair tied inside or around the wound. On the same theory that the injury's cause could also be the cure came the metaphor for taking a drink of alcohol to lessen the discomfort of "the morning after." There's some truth to the idea: The symptoms of hangover are partly induced by a withdrawal from alcohol poisoning. A small measure of alcohol may be some temporary relief, even if in the longer term the piper will have to be paid.

It is possible that the phrase was used to justify an existing practice, as the idea of "like cures like" dates back at least to the time of Hippocrates. This idea exists today as the basic postulate of classical homeopathy.

One wonders how many people got bitten again when trying to approach the guilty dog to acquire the hair to achieve this completely useless remedy.

In the 1930s, cocktails known as Corpse Revivers were served in hotels.

wear a hair shirt

A "hair shirt" is an uncomfortable garment made of coarse hair or other material worn against the skin, intended to keep the wearer in a state of discomfort and constant awareness of the shirt's presence. It's used in some religious rituals as punishment or penance. By extension, a hair shirt is something a person wears or does to intentionally make an aspect of their life uncomfortable or unpleasant, often as a form of penance.

Early shirts were made from sackcloth or coarse animal hair so that they irritated the skin, and later versions integrated additional uncomfortable

features such as thin wires or twigs. The tradition of wearing hair shirts is part of a practice called the mortification of the flesh. Mortification ranges from a simple denial of pleasures to actually committing serious injury, as in the case of medieval flagellants who whipped themselves during the time of the plague. This is said to be an expression of faith.

The shirts were usually worn under other garments, because showing one off would be a form of vanity, punishable by additional penances.

keep your hair on

"Keep your hair on" is a phrase used to tell someone to remain patient and calm, especially when beginning to become angry or upset with impatience. It's related to "keep your shirt on," meaning slow down, take it easy.

by a hair

"By a hair" means by an extremely small distance or narrow margin. This phrase is commonly paired with the verbs win, lose, and escape. Which means barely won, barely lost, or barely escaped.

The idea is also expressed as "by a hairbreadth" or "by a whisker."

make someone's hair stand on end

To "make someone's hair stand on end" means to terrify them.

The phrase is first found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 1602:

"I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood, make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres, thy knotted and combined locks to part and each particular hair to stand an end, like quills upon the fretful porpentine."

I think Shakespeare meant a "fretful porcupine."

The allusion is to the actual sensation of hairs, especially those on the neck, standing upright when the skin contracts due to cold or to fear. This is otherwise known as 'goose-flesh,' a condition which was known by the splendid word "horripilation." This was defined by Thomas Blount in his book *Glossographia, or a dictionary interpreting such hard words as are now used*, 1656.

neither hide nor hair

"Neither hide nor hair" means there's no trace of something lost or missing.

For example, "I haven't seen hide nor hair of the children."

The term, which dates from Chaucer's time, alludes to the fact that the outside of an animal is made up of hide and hair, which therefore constitute its entirety. The negative version, nearly always meaning that something or someone cannot be seen or found, became common in the mid-nineteenth century.

set one's hair on fire

To "set one's hair on fire" means to fill one with intense or overwhelming passion, often causing erratic or wild behavior.

This phrase is believed to have originated among Navy aviators, intended to convey a sense of hair-raising urgency. However, references to 'hair on fire' can be found in the teachings of ancient Buddhists as well as the 1939 James Joyce novel *Finnegan's Wake*.

Ancient Buddhist wisdom holds that a person should seek enlightenment in the same way a person whose 'hair is on fire' would seek water, meaning with the utmost urgency.

hairpin bend

A hairpin bend is a U-shaped bend in a road with a very acute inner angle, making it necessary for a vehicle to turn about 180 degrees to continue on the road. It is named for its resemblance to a bent metal hairpin. Such turns in ramps and trails may also be called switchbacks.

hairsplitting

Hairsplitting refers to making overly fine or trivial distinctions in arguments or discussions, often focusing on minor details that are not significant. It can also imply unnecessary criticism or objections about unimportant matters.

Chapter 8 — Bottleneck

(neck, throat)

neck

"Neck," as a noun, has several meanings:
—the part of an animal connecting the head to the body
—the tooth, between crown and root
—the narrow end of a bottle
—part of a stringed musical instrument
—a narrow margin
—a narrow connection: a neck of land

As a verb, "neck "seems to have only one meaning: to kiss and caress amorously. That sounds nice.

Idioms in brief:

—brass neck: cheek, impudence, insolence, nerve

—dead from the neck up: very stupid or foolish

—fall on one's neck: to embrace someone joyously

—get it in the neck: to be punished or severely criticized

—have a foot on someone's neck: have control over someone

—save (one's) neck: rescue one from disaster

—stiff-necked: stubborn, arrogant, or aloof

—win by a neck: to succeed by a very narrow margin

stick your neck out

To stick your neck out means to take a risk, to do or say something which other people are afraid to do, and as a result possibly attract attention or trouble. Another way of saying it is, "lay your neck on the block."

There are several theories about where the phrase originated. It may have come from boxing, where fighters need to keep their necks and chins drawn in or protected in order to avoid being hit by their opponent. Or it could have come from turtles. When a turtle sticks its neck and head out, it's more vulnerable to predators.

The third theory is that it originated as American slang, probably based on the barnyard chicken that was laid on a chopping block with its neck stretched out and then beheaded with an ax.

But, as Rick said in the movie Casablanca, "I stick my neck out for nobody."

be up to your neck (in something)

The phrase means to be very busy, or deeply involved, especially something dangerous or criminal. It may also mean to be overwhelmed by having or doing too much. It means being in a difficult situation and can be expressed as "I'm up to my ass in alligators."

breathe down someone's neck

To breathe down someone's neck is to monitor someone closely, usually in an overbearing and irritating way. It means to stay close to someone, watching everything they do. Figuratively, it can mean an approaching deadline.

a millstone around one's neck

A millstone is one of a pair of very heavy round flat stones which are used to grind grain. To carry "a millstone around your neck" means to bear an extremely difficult or heavy burden, something which limits your freedom or makes you worry.

The literal hanging of a millstone about the neck is mentioned as a punishment in the New Testament. The expression has been in continuous use in English since at least the 1300s.

an albatross around one's neck

Similar to a millstone, an albatross is a burden which some unfortunate person has to carry, by way of retribution for doing something wrong. It's an unwanted burden or a curse, a heavy burden that becomes an obstacle to success.

Sailors considered the albatross bird to be an omen or manifestation of good luck, and to harm one was to invite disaster not only to the shooter or trapper but the entire ship's company. In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the ship's captain killed one such bird that had landed on the deck while the ship was becalmed. When the weather continued too calm for sailing, the crew blamed the captain's action for the bad luck, and he was forced to wear the albatross's carcass around his neck as a reminder of his misdeed.

> "Ah! well a-day! What evil looks
> Had I from old and young!
> Instead of the cross, the Albatross
> About my neck was hung."

Today, the phrase is used to characterize an unpleasant duty or circumstance that's impossible to avoid. It can even refer to something moderately annoying, like an old piece of furniture you can't get rid of. At least the furniture doesn't rot.

break one's neck

Literally, the phrase means to cause one's neck bone to crack or break. Figuratively, it means to put forth a great deal of effort, to hurry as fast as one can, to proceed with reckless speed.

The same idea is conveyed by "breakneck speed," the word breakneck dating from the sixteenth century. At that time, however, to break someone's neck also meant to overpower or overwhelm them. This was Sir Geoffrey Fenton's meaning when he wrote, "To breake the necke of the wicked purposes and plots of the French" (*The History of Guicciardini*, 1579).

neck and crop

"Neck and crop" means totally and completely, often abruptly.

The idiom dates from the 1700s. It was originally used to describe a comprehensive and spectacular fall from a horse where the unseated rider flies past the horse's neck and throat, 'crop' being an archaic word for throat that remains in this expression and has nothing to do with crop as in a riding crop or whip.

neck and neck

"Neck and neck" means extremely close together, so close that the advantage or lead shifts from one to the other or is virtually indistinguishable, as in "The two are neck and neck in developing a new operating system for the computer."

The phrase may have come from horse racing. It's used when two or more horses are running alongside each other towards the finish line. When the horses are evenly matched, running side by side, they are said to be "neck and neck."

This phrase is now used for any competition or comparison that is evenly matched, for example, "this basketball game is neck and neck."

pain in the neck

A "pain in the neck" is an especially irritating, aggravating, or obnoxious

person, thing, or situation. It's also expressed as pain in the ass or butt. A dead car battery can be a pain in the neck, and so can your nosy neighbor.

This term replaced the earlier "pain in the stomach" about the turn of the twentieth century; both are euphemisms for a pain in the ass.

by the scruff of the neck

To grab someone "by the scruff of the neck" means to hold that person or an animal by the skin or fur at the back of the neck. This phrase is often used to describe a way of lifting or carrying someone in a firm manner. It's the way mother cats carry their kittens.

crick in the neck

A "crick (or kink) in the neck" refers to a sudden stiffness or pain in the neck, often caused by muscle strain or tension. This can result from poor posture or sleeping in an awkward position. It can make it difficult to move the neck comfortably and is usually temporary. However, a crick in the neck can also come from a medical condition such as spinal stenosis, which is the narrowing of the spinal canal that can compress the spinal cord or nerves. If neck stiffness is accompanied by symptoms like pain radiating into the arms or legs, it may indicate a more serious condition requiring medical attention.

The word "crick" by itself is a variant of "creek," originating in the US and means a small, shallow stream.

roughneck

A "roughneck" is an uncouth person, a thug, or a person whose occupation is hard manual labor. The term applies across a number of industries, but is most commonly associated with the workers on a drilling rig. The ideal of the hard-working, tough roughneck has been adopted by several sports teams who use the phrase as part of their name or logo.

Originally the term was used in the traveling carnivals of the 1800s US, almost interchangeably with roustabout. By the 1930s the terms had transferred to the oil drilling industry, with roughneck used for those who worked on the floor of a drilling rig handling specialised drilling equipment for drilling and pressure controls. By contrast, a roustabout would perform general labor, such as loading and unloading cargo from crane baskets and assisting welders, mechanics, electricians and other skilled workers.

wring one's neck

To "wring one's neck" can mean to kill an animal by twisting its neck, or to strangle a human. It can be used informally to express extreme anger towards someone, as in "I could wring his neck!" This phrase is used as a threat, but never refers to actually strangling someone.

yoke around one's neck

The phrase "yoke around one's neck" refers to a heavy burden or difficult responsibility that someone has to deal with, which often feels oppressive or limiting.

The word "yoke" is derived from Old English, meaning "to join together." It is defined as a heavy wooden collar or harness that is fitted around the necks of draft animals. The yoke is attached to a cart or plow that the animals will be pulling. An alternate meaning of the word is used in reference to the part of an article of clothing that fits over the shoulders, to which the main body of the garment is attached.

throat

The throat is the front part of the neck that connects the mouth to the esophagus and trachea, allowing for the passage of food, air, and sound. It contains important structures like the pharynx, larynx, and vocal cords. I'm especially fond of the way it helps roast beef down the track to the stomach.

And, of course, the importance of the throat in humans is the reason it's a popular word to use in everyday language.

Idioms in brief:

—at each other's throats: fighting angrily

—cut someone's throat: cause someone's ruin

—full-throated: loud and powerful

—jump down someone's throat: react suddenly and angrily

—my heart is in my throat: extremely nervous or frightened

—shove something down someone's throat: force acceptance

—sticks in your throat: bothers you

a lump in your throat

Saying that you have a lump in your throat usually means you're having an intense emotional reaction resulting in a sensation of tightness in the throat, as often precedes crying.

cut-throat competition

Cut-throat competition is a term that was widely used to describe the reason for consumer protection regulation, labor law, and enforcement of antitrust law, in the late 19th and early 20th century.

In economics, cut-throat competition is also referred to as ruinous, excessive or unfettered competition. Many countries have strict legislation against cut-throat competition and anti-competitive practices in pricing.

go for the throat

To "go for the throat" is to engage in an aggressive attack against someone without holding back or showing any mercy; to attack the most vulnerable part of someone. The phrase is usually (though not always) understood as referring to a non-physical attack. A similar phrase in use is "go for the jugular."

a frog in your throat

If you have a frog in your throat, you find it difficult to speak clearly because you need to cough. It can also mean an inability to speak owing to some overwhelming emotion, especially fear.

This is an American phrase that entered the language toward the end of the 1800s. The expression comes directly from the fact that a hoarse person sounds croaky — like a frog.

In medieval times, there was a belief that if you drank water containing frogs' eggs, the frogs would grow inside your body. People believed that sore throats and coughing could be caused by the frogs trying to escape from your stomach through your throat.

Some websites claim "a frog in your throat" derives from the belief that "in medieval times physicians thought that the secretions of a frog could help heal a sore throat." That's true; they did have that belief, but any link between that and the phrase "frog in the throat" is one of the pieces of folk etymology that float around the Internet and enjoy apparent immortality, despite having no basis in truth and no supporting evidence. Holding a live frog in a child's mouth until the frog died was thought, in the 1600s, to be a cure for thrush (a viral infection of the mouth). No one at the time used the phrase "a frog in the

throat," which isn't known until much later, in the late 1800s.

As a general rule, any explanation of the origin of a phrase that begins with "In medieval times…" should be treated with suspicion.

Chapter 9 — Beating Heart

heart

The heart is the organ which pumps blood through the body, thus essential to physical life. For centuries, the heart was also thought to be the center of the emotions, which is probably why there are so many idioms attached to it. The brain was not understood to have any function whatsoever. We can see this in the way Egyptians treated mummification. The heart was carefully preserved because the deceased would need it in the afterlife. The brain was removed and discarded.

The familiar symbol of a red heart representing love developed in the 1400s and is now ubiquitous.

Idioms in brief:

—a heart the size of Texas: extremely kind

—a song in your heart: feeling joyful

—aching heart: pain or sorrow

—affair of the heart: an emotional bond

—after one's own heart: shares one's tastes

—at heart: one's real nature or feelings

—bare one's heart: tell all

—be close to one's heart: personally important

—be engraved on your heart: never forgotten

—black-hearted: malicious or wicked

—capture one's heart: win someone's love

—change of heart: change of opinion

—chicken-hearted: easily frightened, cowardly

—cold-hearted: lacking affection and warmth

—cry from the heart: a passionate appeal

—cry your heart out: cry a great deal

—do someone's heart good: lift one's spirits

—emptier than a banker's heart: totally empty

—enshrine in one's heart: cherish

—faint heart never won fair lady: bravery wins success

—faint-hearted: timid, fearful

—find it in your heart: convince oneself

—follow your heart: do what you love
—from the bottom of my heart: intensely sincere
—get to the heart of the matter: focus on essentials
—half-hearted: not fully committed
—hard-hearted: harsh, pitiless
—have a heart of glass: emotionally vulnerable
—have a heart-to-heart: an intimate conversation
—have a heart!: be reasonable!
—have one's heart stand still: sudden shock or fear
—have something at heart: care deeply
—heart and soul: completely
—heart-rending: causing great mental pain
—heart-stopper: emotionally gripping
—heart-to-heart: candid conversation
—heart-warming: emotionally rewarding
—heartache: emotional anguish or grief
—heartfelt: sincere
—heartless: without emotion
—hearts and flowers: sentimentality
—in good heart: cheerful
—in one's heart of hearts: one's truest feelings
—in one's heart: deep and honest feelings
—key to your heart: what makes you happy
—lie at the heart of something: at the core
—lose heart: become discouraged
—lose your heart: fall in love
—make a half-hearted effort: unenthusiastic try
—melt the heart: fill with compassion
—my heart goes out to you: I feel sympathy
—my heart skipped a beat: startled, scared, excited
—near to one's heart: important to one
—one's heart is jumping out of one's chest: very excited
—one's heart isn't in it: be uninterested
—one's heart leaps: happy or excited
—one's heart's desire: want very much

—open your heart: share your deepest thoughts
—pierce through the heart: cause strong emotion
—play on one's heartstrings: evoke strong emotions
—play with one's heart: manipulate one's emotions
—search one's heart: examine one's own emotions
—set one's heart on: have a strong desire for
—set someone's heart on fire: excite them
—set your heart at rest: stop worrying
—sick at heart: very sad and upset
—speak from the heart: speak sincerely
—steal someone's heart: win someone's love
—strike at the heart: attack the central part
—take heart: gain courage or confidence
—take to heart: be seriously concerned
—tear one's heart out: make one very sad
—the fullness of your heart: abundance of emotion
—the heart has its reasons: strong emotions
—to one's heart's content: complete satisfaction
—touches the heart: affects your emotions
—warm-hearted: sympathetic and kind
—weigh heavily on one's heart: intense sadness or regret
—whole-hearted: complete commitment, warmth
—win one's heart: gain one's love or admiration
—young at heart: optimistic, enthusiastic
—your heart sinks: disappointed or disheartened

head versus heart

Do you use your head or follow your heart? Psychologists say the answer predicts personality, emotion, decision making, and performance.

Two body parts — the head and the heart — have been ascribed particular psychological significance throughout the history of Western civilization. Plato was among the first to suggest that the head is the source of rational wisdom, whereas the heart is the source of the passions. Similar heart and head metaphors pervade the work of Shakespeare, for example, and also many other writers. They are still in common use today.

In a scientific study, people were asked to locate the self in the head or the heart. Irrespective of sex differences, head-locators characterized themselves as rational, logical, and interpersonally cold, whereas heart-locators characterized themselves as emotional, feminine, and interpersonally warm.

In one study, 52% of the participants viewed the self as a heart-related entity and 48% viewed the self as a head-related entity. There was thus an even split among responders. On the other hand, the percentage of women choosing the heart organ was 64%, whereas the percentage of men choosing the heart organ was 43%.

Since science has proven that the heart is a simple pump and that the brain mediates between reason and emotion, all we can make of those percentages is that some people make decisions based on logic and some do so based on emotion.

break someone's heart

To "break someone's heart" is to cause severe emotional pain or grief. For example, "If the verdict is guilty, it will break her mother's heart." This hyperbole has appeared in works by Chaucer, Shakespeare, and George Bernard Shaw, among others. In noun form it appears as both a broken heart and heartbreak (Shaw wrote a play entitled *Heartbreak House*, 1913). Today it also is used ironically, as in "You only scored an A-minus on the final? That breaks my heart!"

Failed romantic love or unrequited love can be extremely painful. People with a broken heart may succumb to depression, anxiety and, in more extreme cases, post-traumatic stress disorder.

learn by heart

To "learn by heart" means to learn or memorize something completely. If you know something such as a poem by heart, you have learned it so well that you can remember it without using notes or a book.

Learning by rote means the same thing. "By rote" has a slightly different origin, meaning 'to learn by the wheel' — from 'rota,' the Latin word for 'wheel.' The allusion is to turning the thought over and over in the mind or saying it over and over again, in much the same way as a wheel goes around.

you're all heart!

This phrase is sometimes used sarcastically to tell a person how kind they are: "Thanks for giving me all this work — you're all heart!" But it can also be

used to tell someone that they are very kind and generous.

with all one's heart

"With all one's heart" means sincerely, completely, strongly, with all the energy and enthusiasm you can muster. This phrase has been around since the 1500s, and was so well known by the time Jonathan Swift assembled *Polite Conversation* (1738) that he wrote, "With all my heart and a piece of my liver."

Strong emotions often bring bodily responses that cause sensations in the chest, such as heart palpitations or shortness of breath. Some of this is spine, some muscles, and some lungs, but nothing to do with the heart.

with hand on heart

This phrase is used when making a sincere statement: "Hand on heart, it's the honest truth." People put their hands on their hearts when making a promise or pledge, also when swearing that they are telling the truth: "Cross my heart and hope to die if I'm lying!"

have the heart

"Have the heart" means to have the courage or resolve to do something. It's often used in the negative, as in: "I didn't have the heart to tell him he'd failed."

heart of gold

If you have a heart of gold, you have a very kind and good nature. This expression alludes to gold in the sense of "something valued for its goodness."

The term dates from the sixteenth century and was already well known by the time Shakespeare wrote *Henry V* (1599), in which Pistol describes his master: "The king's a bawcock, and a heart of gold." (A bawcock, in Elizabethan jargon, was a fine fellow; the term comes from the French *beau coq*, "fine bird.")

heavy-hearted

To be heavy-hearted is to be in a sad or miserable state. The adjective heavy has been used in the sense of "weighed down with grief or sadness" since about 1300. Its antonym, "light," dates from the same period. The latter use survives only in "light heart," meaning "freedom from the weight of sorrow" or "a happy feeling."

absence makes the heart grow fonder

This proverb means that separation intensifies love. The phrase can be traced back for millennia. The Roman poet Sextus Propertius is credited with the earliest version of the phrase in his *Elegies*. However, it only became popular after Thomas Haynes Bayly used it as the last line of a song in *The Isle of Beauty* (1850). The opposite sentiment is expressed by 'familiarity breeds contempt.'

According to a study published by the *Journal of Communication*, couples in long distance relationships have more meaningful interactions than those who see each other on a daily basis, leading to higher levels of intimacy. The study says that the major difference between long distance and geographically proximate relationships is that long distance lovers have limited face-to-face interactions. In an effort to keep the romance alive, couples will engage in more frequent communication and discuss deeper issues, such as love, trust and future plans.

'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' was also source material for the wordplay: "Absinthe makes the fart grow stronger."

home is where the heart is

This proverb means that one's home is made up of the places and people one loves or cherishes most. The sentiment of this expression is generally attributed to the Roman naval commander, Gaius Plinius Secundus, known to historians as Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE).

It is no secret that individuals develop very strong emotional attachments to the places that they live, especially with the passage of time. Because our physical surroundings play such an important role in creating a sense of meaning and organization in our lives, it is not surprising that our sense of the place we live is closely tied to our sense of who we are.

In the "Wizard of Oz," Dorothy doesn't achieve closure until she recognizes that "There is no place like home." Thus, the word "home" connotes more than just a house—but how exactly do we determine where "home" is?

It's the place where you feel in control and properly oriented in space and time; it is a predictable and secure place. In the words of poet Robert Frost, "Home is the place that, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." In short, "home" is the primary connection between you and the rest of the world.

For most people, home is the center of the world and a place of order that contrasts with the chaos elsewhere. When asked to draw a picture of "where you live," children and adolescents worldwide invariably center their drawings around the home, making it the anchor for everything else.

The Tiwi of Bathurst Island (off the coast of Northern Australia) even believed that their island was the only habitable place in the world and all other places were thought of as the "land of the dead." The Tiwi believed that sailors shipwrecked on their island were dead spirits, and they were killed because they did not belong in the land of the living.

be still, my beating heart

This exclamation means that something is so exciting or overwhelming that it is causing one's heart to beat too fast. In modern usage, it is almost always used sarcastically to imply that something is actually mundane, uninteresting, or unappealing.

It was originally used with the swooning earnestness of women's poetry of the Romantic period. But the comic manner in which it is now delivered was brought to a wide public in Gilbert and Sullivan's opera *HMS Pinafore* (1878).

warm the cockles of your heart

This phrase means that something gives you a comforting feeling of pleasure or contentment and happiness, right to the core of your being. Cockles are a type of shellfish, associated with the heart because they have a similar shape. The zoological name for cockles is 'Cardium,' which comes from the Greek word for 'heart.'

hearty

To be hearty means to be very friendly (a hearty welcome), enthusiastic (a hearty cheer), or large (a hearty breakfast). Hearty people are inclined to be kindly, exuberant, and cheerful.

in a heartbeat

To do something in a heartbeat means in a very brief time. In computer science, a heartbeat is a periodic signal generated by hardware or software to indicate normal operation or to synchronize other parts of a computer system.

wear your heart on your sleeve

To wear your heart on your sleeve means to openly show your feelings or

emotions rather than keeping them hidden.

But why are we "wearing" our emotions? And why a sleeve? Shakespeare used the phrase in *Othello*, and it's likely the idea came from medieval jousts. In the Middle Ages, sleeve not only referred to a part of a garment covering the arm but to a piece of armor for covering and protecting the arm. When participating in a joust, knights would often dedicate their performance to a lady of the court and wear something of hers, such as a scarf or ribbon, around their sleeve of armor, which indicated to the tournament's spectators which lady the knight favored.

The story fits. But is it true? There is, alas, no evidence.

my heart bleeds

If you say that your heart bleeds for someone, you mean that you feel a lot of sympathy for them because they are suffering. This expression is also often used ironically to show that you think someone does not deserve any sympathy, because you don't believe that they are genuinely suffering. This imagery was used by Chaucer and Shakespeare to express sincere anguish.

eat your heart out

"To eat your heart out" means to feel bitter envy, anguish, grief, worry, jealousy, or another strong negative emotion. The allusion is to something gnawing at your heart.

The saying has its root in a Latin phrase, *cor ne edito*, which Plutarch gave as a *Parable of Pythagoras*, meaning "eat not thy heart." The warning can be interpreted to mean "do not torture your soul with worry."

"Eating our hearts for weariness and sorrow" appeared in Homer's *Odyssey* (ca. 850 BCE). Presumably here, as in later usage, eating one's heart is analogous to consuming one's inmost self with worry or anxiety. A modern slangy variant, used as a humorous taunt, is the spoken imperative "eat your heart out!" meaning "doesn't that make you jealous?"

have one's heart in one's mouth

This idiom describes experiencing fear to such a degree that your heart starts beating wildly and feels as if it could beat its way up into your mouth. It appeared in Latin, the *Satyricon*, written by Gaius Petronius who died c. CE 66.

have one's heart in the right place

To "have your heart in the right place" means to be well-intentioned, kind, considerate, and generous, even if you don't always seem to be. For example, "He's very strict with his students, but his heart is in the right place." The phrase is used especially when one's actions have negative results.

bleeding heart liberal

The phrase "bleeding heart liberal" is used to describe one who shows excessive sympathy for other people's misfortunes and is historically used as an insult toward more liberal politicians.

Before bleeding heart was ever an established phrase, the notion of hearts bleeding as a sincere emotional outpouring was a common one in art and literature. Geoffrey Chaucer employed the image in his epic 14th-century poem *Troilus and Criseyde*. The symbol for selfless and sacrificial love, within the Christian tradition, was the bleeding heart.

The plant called the bleeding heart was first known by that name in the late 17th century. Most plants bearing the name belong to the genus *Dicentra*, but the one most commonly called a bleeding heart has pink or white heart-shaped flowers that droop.

cold hands, warm heart

This phrase is used to describe someone who appears very reserved, but is a kind-hearted person. Why a literally cold hand should indicate sympathy or affection is not really clear, but this expression has been so used since about 1900.

cross my heart and hope to die

In using this phrase, you attest to the truth of something and solemnly assure someone that the truth has been spoken. This phrase most likely originated as a religious oath based on the sign of the cross first.

heartthrob

Literally, a heartthrob is a pulsation of the heart. Figuratively, it's either your sweetheart or a person who is the object of popular romantic infatuation or desire.

my heart's in my boots

If your heart is in your boots, you have suddenly become disappointed,

disheartened, or despondent because of an undesirable outcome or turn of events.

the way to a man's heart is through his stomach

This proverb explains that if you want a man to love you, you should feed him good food.

Quote from Robert Byrne: "Anybody who believes that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach flunked geography."

a drunk mind speaks a sober heart

"A drunk mind speaks a sober heart" is a proverb which states that a person who is inebriated is less inhibited and thus more likely to say what they truly think or feel. It's commonly attributed to French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

hearts and minds

Winning hearts and minds is a concept occasionally expressed in the resolution of war, insurgency, and other conflicts, in which one side seeks to prevail not by the use of superior force, but by making emotional or intellectual appeals to sway supporters of the other side.
The term "hearts and minds" was first used by French general Hubert Lyautey during the Tonkin campaign in 1895.

let one's heart rule one's head

To let one's heart rule one's head means to make decisions based on emotions rather than logic or reason, often prioritizing feelings like love or passion over practical considerations. This phrase is commonly used in discussions about personal relationships and impulsive choices.

steel one's heart against

To "steel one's heart against" or "harden one's heart" means to keep oneself from feeling kindness and compassion towards someone or something. It often involves preparing oneself to face something unpleasant or challenging without being swayed by emotions. Versions of it date from the late 1500s.

Chapter 10 — Bosom Buddies

(breast, chest)

breast

The word "breast" has both literal and figurative meanings:
— one of the mammary glands occurring on the chest of human beings and other primates, especially of the female after pubertal development
—either of the analogous but rudimentary organs of the male chest
—the front part of the body between the neck and the abdomen
—the part of clothing that covers the breast
—the seat of emotion and thought
—a curving part resembling a breast (chimney breast)
—a cut of meat, especially from poultry
—a source of nourishment (the city took the victims to its breast)
—to contend with resolutely (breast criticism)
—thrust the chest against (the sprinter breasted the tape)
—ascend (breast a hill)

Though the first known usage of the term was before the 1100s, many synonyms have been invented. One website claimed to have 300 slang words for breasts, many regarded as vulgar. Here are a few:
assets, badoinkies, balloons, bangers, bazookas,
bazooms, bosom, breasticles, bumpers, bust, cans,
charlies, chichis (Latin America), cleavage, coconuts,
ding-dongs, funbags, gazongas, headlights, hooters,
jugs, kahunas, knockers, lady lumps, love pillows,
melons, milk jugs, milkers, money makers, mosquito bites,
puppies, rack, shock absorbers, snuggle pups, tatas,
the twins, threepenny bits (Cockney rhyming slang),
tits, titties, tooraloorals, torpedoes.

Breasts have been featured in ancient and modern sculpture, art, and photography. They can figure prominently in the perception of a woman's body and sexual attractiveness. A number of cultures associate breasts with sexuality and tend to regard bare breasts in public as immodest or indecent. Breasts, especially the nipples, are an erogenous zone.

In European pre-historic societies, sculptures of female figures with pronounced or highly exaggerated breasts were common. A typical example is the so-called Venus of Willendorf, one of many Paleolithic Venus figurines with ample hips and bosom. Artifacts such as bowls, rock carvings and sacred statues with breasts have been recorded from 15,000 BCE up to late antiquity all across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.

beat one's breast

To "beat one's breast" literally refers to striking your fist against your chest as an expression of sorrow, anger, or woe. I've never seen anyone do this, but the expression survives as a poetic expression that describes any act of displaying guilt and remorse publicly.

The phrase can also mean publicly express emotions or views that one does not actually feel or support.

keep abreast of

The term "keep abreast of" means to stay up-to-date with something, as in "He's keeping abreast of the latest weather reports." This term alludes to the nautical sense of abreast, which describes ships keeping up with each other. (Late 1600s)

bare one's breast

To "bare one's breast" is to share with another person one's private emotions and thoughts, especially those that are emotionally troubling, or make oneself vulnerable to the other person in some way. "Susie's a very private person—she won't bare her breast to just anyone."

The idiom can also mean to expose oneself in a vulnerable or unguarded position, especially to that which may cause harm or distress. "He bared his breast to the armed guards to show that he was not a threat."

booby

"Booby" is a silly word but, over the ages, it's become one of the most common, recognizable ways to refer to a woman's breasts. "Booby" is a multi-use word, though, because it can also mean a foolish person, a mistake, or a bird.

According to *The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang*, the term "boob" probably showed up around the late 1600s, along with "paps." Slang lexicographer Jonathon Green believes that "boobs" derives from the word "bubbies," which has its root in the Latin *bibere*, which means "to drink."

Over time, bubbies became boobies, which eventually ended up as boobs. I'm only guessing, but perhaps "paps" became "puppies."

The bird known as a "booby" lives in the tropics and has brightly colored feet, such as yellow, blue, or red. Similar to a gannet, it lives on fish, but is so tame

that it's easily captured. The bird's name comes from the Spanish word "bobo," which means "fool" or "stupid." Now it's also used to describe silly or foolish humans.

as useless as tits on a boar

This phrase (or "tits on a bull") is vulgar slang for ineffectual, pointless, or unnecessary.

The phrase refers to the fact that boars and bulls do not produce milk and therefore have no use for nipples. The inclusion of this anatomical detail adds an element of humor to the phrase, making it more memorable and attention-grabbing.

A similar saying is "useless as a screen door on a submarine."

bosom buddies

A bosom buddy is a very close, intimate friend, one who's always got your back and with whom you do and share everything.

Bosom friend is recorded in the late 1500s. Back then, the bosom referred to the chest as the seat of deep emotions, though now the word usually means a woman's breasts. A bosom friend, then, is one you might share deep feelings with or have deep feelings for.

get one's tits in the wringer

This idiom describes a situation where someone finds themselves in difficulties. It uses the metaphor of getting one's breasts into a wringer, which was once a common household appliance used for washing clothes. When clothes were put through this machine, they would be squeezed tightly between two rollers. Similarly, when someone gets their breasts caught in a wringer, it means they are experiencing extreme discomfort or distress.

The idiom has been used since at least the 1940s. It is often used humorously or sarcastically to describe situations where someone has made a poor decision that leads to negative consequences.

go tits up

To "go tits up" means to break or malfunction, to die, fall apart, or cease to work. It's a play on the phrase "go belly up."

"Belly-up" is an allusion to fish, which float that way when dead in the water.

This expression was known in the USA by the 1920s, often related to bankruptcy or other commercial disasters.

"Tits up" was in common use in the British Armed Forces after WWII. It may have originated earlier. Its use meant "complete failure" (for example, "the HF radio is tits up"), and was apocryphally ascribed to drowned female bodies floating "tits up" whereas male bodies float face down. The RAF used a euphemism for this — pear-shaped — when socially necessary.

Personally, I like the acronym explanation as provided by acronymfinder.com: Total Inability To Support Usual Performance.

music has charms to soothe the savage breast

This quote suggests the power of music to calm and pacify the most aggressive or hostile individuals. The phrase "savage breast" refers to a wild or fierce heart, implying that music has the ability to soothe and tranquilize even the most turbulent emotions.

The phrase sounds Shakespearian but in fact comes to us from *The Mourning Bride*, a poem by William Congreve, 1697:

> Musick has Charms to sooth a savage Breast,
> To soften Rocks, or bend a knotted Oak.

The additional mentions of "softening rocks" and "bending a knotted oak" further emphasize the idea that music possesses extraordinary persuasive and transformative qualities.

viper in one's bosom

A "viper in one's bosom" is a friend, lover, or relation who proves to be traitorous, untrustworthy, deceitful, or ungrateful.

This metaphoric expression comes from Aesop's fable about a farmer who shelters a snake dying from the cold, which then fatally bites him after it recovers. It was referred to by Chaucer and Shakespeare, and appeared in numerous proverb collections.

Chest

Idioms in brief:

—chest-thumping: boastful or arrogant behavior
—get something off your chest: unburden
—hold your cards close to your chest: keep your plans secret
—put hair on your chest: become stronger
—take the spear in one's chest: to accept full blame

fifteen men on a dead man's chest

Fifteen Men on the Dead Man's Chest is a fictional sea song, originally from Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island*, published in 1883. It was expanded in a poem, titled *Derelict* by Young E. Allison, published in the Louisville Courier-Journal in 1891. It has since been used in many later works of art in various forms.

Stevenson found the name "Dead Man's Chest" among a list of Virgin Island names in a book by Charles Kingsley. Stevenson once said or wrote, "*Treasure Island* came out of Kingsley's *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (1871), where I got the 'Dead Man's Chest'—that was the seed." And that seed grew into Stevenson's novel.

Stevenson wrote only the chorus, leaving the remainder of the song to be imagined by readers.

> Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—
> …Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!
> Drink and the devil had done for the rest—
> …Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!

hope chest

A hope chest (also called dowry chest, trousseau chest, or glory box) is a wooden box or trunk once commonly used by unmarried young women to collect items, such as clothing and household linen, in anticipation of married life. Common contents included hand-stitched linens, quilts, tablecloths, dishes, silverware, and even personal items like handmade clothing and family heirlooms.

The idea behind the hope chest was not simply utility. Each item placed inside was selected or crafted with care, intended to ease the transition into a new chapter of life. In many cultures, the chest itself was just as important as its contents, often made of cedar to protect its contents from moths and decay.

The tradition of the hope chest stretches back centuries and spans multiple cultures. Some of the earliest known versions were the "trousseau" of Europe and, in Renaissance Italy, elaborately decorated chests called "cassoni." In some Nordic families, hope chests were passed from mother to daughter, each

generation adding to the contents.

In England and colonial America, the hope chest became widespread among the middle and working classes. Pioneer families in North America saw the hope chest as a crucial part of a daughter's preparation for adulthood. Settlers often lived in isolated areas where stores were few and far between, so having a well-stocked chest meant being ready for the demands of homemaking.

Chests were often decorated. Carving was a notable technique in joined oak chests during the 17th and 18th centuries. Engraving and painting were other methods, as was sulfur inlay for a brief period of time.

The Lane Furniture Company of Virginia was a notable maker of cedar chests. After developing production-line techniques for ammunition boxes during World War I, they turned these techniques, and a patented locking-mitre corner joint, towards producing chests. They employed celebrity advertising, including a teenage Shirley Temple, in a campaign targeted at GIs of World War II.

war chest

A "war chest" is an accumulation of funds to finance a war effort or a political campaign, or for some similar purpose.

The term is a metaphor for any collection of tools or money intended to be used in a challenging or dangerous situation. Historically, it referred to an actual chest located in the homes or barracks of soldiers, in which arms and armor were stored. Traveling armies, such as that of Hannibal, collected the spoils of war and used them to negotiate with others to resolve conflicts through economic exchange rather than violence.

The term's modern meaning originates with the medieval practice of having a chest, literally filled with money, to open in time of war.

A similar term is "rainy day fund."

Chapter 11 — Bum and Belly

(ass/arse and bum, belly, gut, stomach)

ass

The word "ass" means:
—any of several hoofed mammals, especially the donkey
—a foolish or stupid person
—the buttocks
—the anus
—sexual intercourse (commonly "piece of ass" or "tail")

The word "arse" is a British slang term that refers to the buttocks or anus, and can also be used to describe a foolish or stupid person.

The word "bum" means:
—the buttocks
—a tramp, a vagrant
—a lazy or shiftless person
—someone whose time is devoted to a recreational activity (beach bum)

All three words are considered rude when used for the part of the body you sit on. It's also a rude way of referring to another person or to yourself. But all three words are used extensively and have spawned an amazing number of idioms. Here are some of them:

Idioms in brief:

—arse about face: back to front

—arse bandit: a male homosexual

—as busy as a one-legged arse kicker: very busy

—as cold as a well digger's arse: extremely cold

—as tight as a duck's arse: mean, excessively thrifty

—blow it out your arse: expression of anger or disrespect

—bum around: loaf or wander aimlessly

—bum fodder: badly-written literature

—bum rap/beef: an allegation that is untrue

—bum steer: bad advice, regardless of intention

—bum trip: a frightening narcotic experience

—bum: to beg or borrow from someone

—bummed: discouraged or depressed

—cover one's ass: take action to avoid censure

—crumb bum: a repellent person, or something of poor quality
—die on your arse: fail completely
—doesn't know his arse from his elbow: stupid
—get off your arse: force yourself to start doing something
—get one's arse into gear: start to do something
—have a wild hair up your ass: be irritated, hyperactive
—have your head up your ass: behave foolishly
—Khyber pass: Cockney rhyming slang for arse
—not within an ass's roar of: not close to getting
—on the bum: living as a tramp; out of order; broken
—pain in the arse/bum: aggravating person, thing, or situation
—put one's ass on the line: take a big risk
—shift/move your arse: hurry up, get out of my way
—someone's ass is grass: one will be murdered or beaten up
—stumblebum: an alcoholic, or someone who is inept, clumsy

think the sun shines out of one's ass

The phrase "think the sun shines out of one's ass" means to believe one is better or more important than other people. If a person thinks this about himself, it means that he is arrogant, conceited, or self-absorbed. If he thinks this of another person, it means that he loves or admires that person to such a degree as to be blinded to any of her potential faults. For example, "She's absolutely head-over-heels in love with Martin. Even though I find him a bit irritating, to her it's as if the sun shines out his butt."

ass in a lion's skin

An "ass in a lion's skin" is a blustering fool. The "ass" here is a donkey, trying to portray itself as a strong and powerful lion.

The phrase is the title of one of Aesop's Fables, which goes as follows:

An Ass found a Lion's skin left in the forest by a hunter. He dressed himself in it, and amused himself by hiding in a thicket and rushing out suddenly at the animals who passed that way. All took to their heels the moment they saw him.

The Ass was so pleased to see the animals running away from him, just as if he were King Lion himself, that he could not keep from expressing his delight by a loud, harsh bray. A Fox, who ran with the rest, stopped short as soon as he heard the voice. Approaching the Ass, he said with a laugh, "If you had kept your mouth shut you might have frightened me, too. But you gave

yourself away with that silly bray."

Literary allusions to this fable have been frequent since classical times. In the twentieth century C. S. Lewis put the fable to use in *The Last Battle*, the final volume of *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

bite one in the ass

To "bite one in the ass" means to inflict punishment or misfortune on one for poor judgment or misdeeds. Typically the punishment or misfortune is not exacted by a person, but happens as a general consequence of the misbehavior itself. "Your poor treatment of your employees might come back to bite you in the ass some day."

the law is an ass

"The law is an ass" is a derisive expression said when the rigid application of the letter of the law is seen to be contrary to common sense.

The "ass" being referred to here is the English colloquial name for a donkey. Donkeys have a somewhat unjustified reputation for obstinance and stupidity that has given us the adjective 'asinine.' It is the stupidly rigid application of the law that this phrase calls into question.

The idiom "the law is an ass" is from a play published by the English dramatist George Chapman in 1654 – *Revenge for Honour*: "Ere he shall lose an eye for such a trifle… For doing deeds of nature! I'm ashamed. The law is such an ass."

However, it was Charles Dickens who brought the phrase to the general public. *Oliver Twist* was an enormous success when it was first published as a serial and has become one of the world's best selling novels.

wrangle for an ass's shadow

To "wrangle for an ass's shadow" means to argue over trivial matters. The phrase derives from a Greek legend in which a traveler rents an ass and then squabbles with its owner when they both want to sit in the ass's shadow to avoid the sun. For example, "There's no correct way to hang Christmas lights, so quit wrangling for an ass's shadow and decorate the house already!"

you can't sit in two chairs with one butt

This proverb means that you cannot do or accomplish two things simultaneously, so you must be decisive in choosing or pursuing one. It has

also been phrased as "you can't ride two horses with one ass." For example, "Look, either be with me here, or go take the job in London. It's your choice, but you can't sit in two chairs with one butt."

blow sunshine up one's ass

This idiom means to speak in a deceptively or deceitfully positive manner, usually in an attempt to hide the truth of a situation or to not hurt someone's feelings.

ass end of nowhere

This means a location that is extremely remote or out of the way, sarcastically identified as the farthest point away from anything. It's basically a rude version of " back of beyond."

have a poker up one's ass

To "have a poker (or corncob) up one's ass" means to be very stiff, rigid, or inflexible in one's demeanor, opinions, or beliefs. It can also mean to be irritable, unfriendly, or humorless.

run around like a blue-arsed fly

To "run around like a blue-arsed fly" means work quickly and with much activity while trying to accomplish a large number of tasks, perhaps simultaneously. This idiom is primarily heard in the UK and Australia.

The fly in question is apparently a bluebottle fly, which buzzes around rather frantically, like someone who is running around busily doing errands. The earliest recorded instances of this phrase seem to indicate that it originated in the British armed forces.

bums on seats

"Bums on seats" means the paying audience at a venue with seating, usually a theatre or cinema.

This term, which means much the same as "body count," was coined in the UK in the late 1970s. It indicates a view of an audience as merely numbers to be counted in order to assess the money they have paid for tickets (the "take"). The expression was used in the *Guardian Weekly*, December 1982:

"E.T. thus comes to a beleaguered industry like a gift from the gods. Not only does it get bums on seats but it encourages the kind of shared enjoyment that suggests the cinema still has something unique to offer."

bummer

A "bummer" is an unpleasant or frustrating experience.

The use relies on the sense of "bum" meaning "bad," a usage dating from the late 1800s (see "bum steer"). For example, "That ball game was a bummer; not only did it rain but we lost."

corporate welfare bum

A corporate welfare bum is a corporation or executive who makes money (or is thought to make money) through tax breaks or legal loopholes. The phrase is primarily heard in Canada. It was coined in 1972 by Canadian labor leader and politician David Lewis.

belly

The word "belly" is a more casual way to say "stomach" or "abdomen," just as your navel is informally called a "belly button." A less common way to use the word is as a verb meaning "to swell," which is actually the oldest meaning of belly, from the Old English *belig*, meaning bag, and a Germanic root meaning "to swell like a bag."

Other definitions:
—a cut of meat from a pig
—an appetite for food, gluttony
—the womb, the uterus
—a protruding part: the belly of a sail
—an interior cavity: the belly of a ship or airplane

Idioms in brief:
—belly dance: solo dance by a bare-bellied woman
—belly fiddle: a nickname for the guitar
—belly laugh: a deep hearty laugh
—belly of the beast: a dangerous or hostile place
—belly out: flare out in the wind, as of fabric
—belly up: approach closely, "belly up to the bar"
—bellyache: to complain or gripe about something

—eye is bigger than belly: take more food than one can eat

—fire in the belly: passion and determination

—go belly up: to die, fail, or come to an end

—lower than a snake's belly: despicable or vile

—swill-belly: a drunkard

yellow-belly

A "yellow-belly" means a spineless, cowardly person.

The term began life in England in the late 1700s as a mildly derogatory nickname. Grose's *A Provincial Glossary: with a collection of local proverbs, and popular superstitions*, 1787, lists it:
"Yellow bellies. This is an appellation given to persons born in the Fens of Lincolnshire, who, it is jocularly said, have yellow bellies, like their eels."

It is possible that 'yellow-belly' didn't refer to a person's belly but was simply a piece of nonsense name-calling — somewhat akin to 'lily-livered.'

In fact, frogs found in the fens were yellow-bellied. And, in the 1890s yellow-bellied was used in a literal sense to indicate fish, such as sole and flounder, that have light-colored undersides.

There is also a story about the Wexford hurling team that was to play a match against a Cornwall team, in the late 1500s. The Wexford players had yellow cloth tied around their waists to distinguish them from Cornwall, and this caused them to be nicknamed The Yellowbellies. Wexford teams do still play in yellow and the name has stuck. This story seems to have no connotations of cowardice. The team might just as likely been called the bluebellies or greenbellies if different material had been available on the day. In fact, none of the early English or Irish uses of the name suggest cowardice.

The first record of the term from the US, and one that suggests the derogatory, cowardly meaning, comes from an account of a military skirmish in Texas, reported in *The Wisconsin Enquirer*, April 1842:

"We learn from Capt. Wright, of the N. York, that it is the intention of the Texans to 'keep dark' until the Mexicans cross the Colorado, and then give them a San Jacinto fight, with an army from 5000 to 7000 men. God send that they may bayonet every 'yellow belly' in the Mexican army."

The phrase was often used in film. In the US, the screenplay of a B-feature western movie wasn't complete without some cowboy calling somebody else a yellow-belly.

The color yellow has traditionally been associated with cowardice, treachery, inconstancy and jealousy. The medieval yellow star (continued by the Nazis) branded Jews as having "betrayed Jesus." In medieval paintings, Judas Iscariot (ultimate symbol of treason) is portrayed wearing yellow garments. In Spain, victims of the Inquisition wore yellow, to imply they were guilty of heresy and treason.

But why yellow? It's not an easy derivation to trace. Slightly before the appearance of "yellow-bellied," Asians were the "yellow" race and the term "yellow peril" was used to refer to the insidious Asian "threat" (with the implicit connotation of treachery and deceit) from the 1890s through 1910. But no source suggests any connection between these terms and "yellow-bellied," other than the common use of the word yellow to imply deceit.

A more plausible source is the medieval theory of medicine that assumed there were four humors (fluids) in the body. If they got out of balance, you got sick or went crazy. The four humors were blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Yellow bile made you peevish, choleric, and irascible. From there to yellow as symbol of jealousy and inconstancy was a pretty easy step.

Other uses of yellow include the yellow flag as a symbol of quarantine, intended to isolate victims of yellow fever. And of course, yellow journalism dates from 1895, implying newspapers that used scare headlines, sensationalism, and lavish illustrations to attract readers in a very competitive environment.

And yet, yellow is a bright and cheerful color. Sunshine is supposed to be yellow and so are many flowers, including the dandelion, my favorite. There's also the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a bird which is quiet in the winter, but becomes noisy in spring, with cat-like calls and staccato drumming.

have a bellyful (of something)

This phrase can mean to have as much food as one wants or is able to eat. But it can also mean to have more of someone or something than you can, or are willing, to tolerate or endure.

Delhi belly

"Delhi belly" is a nickname for the diarrhea contracted while traveling abroad —especially in India—due to consuming unfamiliar food and impure water. Other nicknames exist, based on other countries, such as Basra belly and Montezuma's Revenge.

Some suggest that the term originated during British colonial rule in India

when soldiers stationed in Delhi would suffer from gastrointestinal issues. Others believe that it may have been coined by tourists who experienced similar symptoms while traveling through Delhi.

The idiom "Delhi belly" has also made its way into popular culture through movies, books, and music. In 2011, a Bollywood movie titled *Delhi Belly* was released which revolved around three friends who get affected by Delhi's contaminated water supply.

In addition, several songs have been written using this idiom as a metaphor for other situations such as political corruption or societal issues.

a hungry belly has no ears

The idiom "a hungry belly has no ears" means that when you are hungry, you cannot focus on anything but your hunger. Similarly, when you need to urinate, it's difficult to pay attention to anything else until that need has been met. The body is very efficient at making us behave.

Guts

Idioms in brief:

—a kick in the guts: a devastating setback

—gut course: easy academic course

—gut truck: a food truck

—gut-busting: very difficult or tiring

—gut-foundered: very hungry

—misery guts: unhappy person who always complains

—split a gut: laugh so hard it hurts

—gut-shot: abdominal wound from gunfire

—gut it out: persist through a difficult situation

gut feelings

Intuition is often referred to as "gut feelings," as they seem to arise from some deep part of us. In fact, they come from brain processing that automatically compares some current experience with past experience and knowledge, and are delivered to awareness with a lot of emotional certainty. Scientists have

repeatedly demonstrated how information can register on the brain without conscious awareness and later influence behavior.

The earliest sense of guts was "bowels, entrails," and while the word has picked up a number of other meanings over the past thousand or so years, many of them deal in some way with this area of the body, either literally or figuratively.

Sometimes we say that our guts talk to us, and tell us things. Our intuition may have been telling us things for a long time, but what it says isn't necessarily true.

What am I? Chopped liver?

This is a semi-serious expression of frustration, anger, or indignation at having been overlooked and/or regarded as inferior. For example, "They said they wanted to hire someone else for the job. What am I, chopped liver?" And that question means "Don't dismiss me as if I were insignificant."

A dish of chopped liver — fried chicken livers with eggs and spices — is common at Jewish celebratory meals. It's also a standard dish in New York Jewish delicatessens and is often used as a sandwich filling. But it's never a main dish, wherein lies the core of the idiom. Sol Steinmetz, the American linguist and Yiddish expert, explained that "Chopped liver is merely an appetizer or side dish, not as important as chicken soup or gefilte fish. Hence it was used among Jewish comedians as a humorous metaphor for something or someone insignificant."

Not many will agree with me, I suppose, but fried chicken livers are delicious.

navel gazing

"Navel gazing" is literally the excessive contemplation of one's navel, and an idiom usually meaning complacent self-absorption.

It can also describe the actual contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation. This procedure is found in the practice of yoga or Hinduism and sometimes in the Eastern Orthodox Church. The monks of Mount Athos, Greece, were described as "Omphalopsychians" by J.G. Millingen, writing in the 1830s, who says they "…pretended or fancied that they experienced celestial joys when gazing on their umbilical region, in converse with the Deity."

stomach

The stomach is the organ of your body — kind of a big sac — that digests food. Also, stomach can mean having a tolerance for something. If you can't stomach watching football, then perhaps you'll like boxing.

Other definitions:
—a digestive structure of many invertebrates
—the abdomen or belly
—an appetite for food
—to like or dislike: no stomach for quarrels
—courage; spirit
—(obsolete) pride, courage, resentment or anger

Idioms in brief:
—butterflies in the stomach: nervous fluttering sensations
—my stomach thinks my throat's been cut: I'm starving
—sick to the stomach: disgusted, angry, vomiting
—sit heavy on the stomach: more or less indigestible
—stomach in knots: confused, anxious, worried
—turn one's stomach: make nauseated or uncomfortable

cast-iron stomach

Having a "cast-iron stomach" or "strong stomach" is the ability to eat foods that others may find unusual, unpalatable, or too spicy, without experiencing any ill effects like heartburn, nausea, or upset stomach. "You must have a strong stomach if you're eating pickles with peanut butter."

It can also mean not feeling sick or upset when you see or do unpleasant things.

an army marches on its stomach

Soldiers or workers can only fight or function effectively if they have been well fed.

The saying appears to have originated in the 1858 work *History of Friedrich the Second, Called Frederick the Great* by the prominent philosopher, essayist, and historian Thomas Carlyle. The saying occurred in the description of an unsuccessful military endeavor. "They were stronger than Turk and

Saracen, but not than Hunger and Disease. Leaders did not know then that 'an Army, like a serpent, goes upon its belly.'"

Napoleon made a couple of thematically related remarks:

"The world is governed by its belly."

"It is hunger that makes the world move."

in the pit of one's stomach

The "pit of one's stomach" is an area in the core of your abdomen, approximately in or near your stomach, in which you feel a physical response to strong emotion, especially fear, stress, or anxiety.

Psychologists say that the pit in your stomach is actually your second brain. Researchers have discovered that there's an entire ecosystem of bacteria and a vast neural network operating in our guts. This ecosystem is our second brain, and comprises some 100 million neurons, more than the spinal cord. This is not a thinking brain—it does not reason, write poetry, or solve multi-linear regressions—but mounting evidence suggests that your gut's health strongly influences your mood.

It's more than just having a stomach ache. The enteric nervous system is a mesh-like network of neurons that lines the entire digestive tract. It causes the sensation of nervous butterflies or a pit in your stomach that are innate parts of our psychological stress responses. Up to 90 percent of the cells involved in these responses carry information to the brain rather than receiving messages from it, making your gut as influential to your mood as your head is. Maybe even more.

Even crazier is that our second brain is actually only half of us. Inside the digestive system, the enteric nervous system mainly communicates with bacteria. These are completely separate creatures that make up our microbiome, and there are just as many of them inside of us as our own human cells.

This is not an alien takeover. Our gut bacteria have evolved with us since birth. They help digest our food and fight off unfriendly outsiders like viruses and molds. To keep us healthy they need to be healthy and plentiful as well. When they’re not, we feel it: This biomass of bacteria communicates with important neurotransmitters embedded throughout our enteric nervous system to send messages that influence the way we feel.

The human body is beyond amazing.

to stomach

"To stomach" or "to have the stomach for" means to have the courage, determination, or resolve to do, face, or experience something unpleasant. It can also mean having a hunger, or at least a tolerance, for something.

You may think of the stomach as a happy place but, when the word began being used as a verb, "to stomach," it was primarily concerned with ill-will. The earliest sense, in the 16th century, was "to remember with anger, take offense at." This sense is now obsolete, and when we do use stomach as a verb it is generally in the sense of "to put up with."

Chapter 12 — Branching Out

(arm, elbow, shoulder)

arm

The noun "arm" is applied to many objects:
—upper limb of the human body
—the forelimb of an animal
—a long part projecting from a machine
—a sleeve on a garment
—a support on a chair
—a branch of a large mass
—administrative branch, as of an organization
—power or authority
—in sports, the skill of throwing a ball well
—a weapon, especially a firearm
—a branch of a military force

As a verb, "arm" is used as follows:
—to prepare oneself for warfare or conflict
—to equip with weapons
—to provide with something that strengthens or protects
—to prepare a device for use, as by releasing a safety device (such as winding the clock)

Idioms in brief:

—an arm and a leg: an excessively high price

—arms race: a competition for military supremacy

—as long as your arm: very long

—at arm's length: distanced

—bang in the arm: an injection of drugs

—lay down your arms: stop fighting, surrender

—one-armed bandit: a slot machine

—twist someone's arm: to coerce or cajole

—with open arms: in a very kind and friendly way

When "arm" is a noun, it means, for example, the upper limb of a human. When "arm" is a verb, it means "to supply with weapons." Surprisingly, these meanings have two different roots: an arm with a hand on the end of it comes from the Old English *earm*, while the weapon arm is rooted in the Latin *arma*, or "weapons."

arms

The word "arms" refers to offensive and defensive weapons. The meaning has changed little since it was first used seven hundred years ago. These phrases go back centuries: Sergeant at Arms, Master at Arms, and Men at Arms.

"Arms," which dates back to the 1300s, comes from Middle English and originated from the Old French word *armes*, which meant "weapons of a warrior," and from the Latin word for weapons, *arma*.

The word "firearms" popped up around 1640 to describe weapons that used gunpowder compared to other arms like bows and arrows.

The word "armament," which means the weapons and supplies of war supplied to military units, has a slightly different history. It was probably borrowed from French *armement* "meaning the action of arming and equipping of an armed force."

If you hear references on the news to "the arms race" or "arms exports," you know the subject is guns, bombs, bullets, and other weapons and ammunition. Any country with an army has some quantity of arms that can be used for self defense or military actions.

I suspect the original word referred to the human arm. In ancient days, the human arm was the only weapon we had. Then we discovered branches and rocks — and threw them with our arms. The same applies to spears, before we moved on to holding guns or knives.

arm candy

"Arm candy" describes an attractive, seemingly romantic companion who accompanies a person in public simply so that one or both of the individuals can gain attention, enhance social status, or create an impression of sexual appeal.

arms akimbo

Having your arms akimbo means having the hands on the hips and the elbows turned outward.

It's "akimbo" nowadays, but in Middle English, the adverbial phrase "in kenebowe" was used for the bent, hand-on-hip arm (or later, for any bent position). Originally, the term was fairly neutral, but now saying that a person is standing with "arms akimbo" implies a posture that communicates defiance, confidence, aggressiveness, or arrogance. Those versed in body language say that the posture is expansive and used to make the body appear larger and

taking up more space, thereby creating dominance.

It's certainly one of the odder-looking words in the language. Anne Brontë used it in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, writing "Mr. Hattersley strode up to the fire, and interposing his height and breadth between us and it, stood with arms akimbo, expanding his chest, and gazing round him as if the house and all its appurtenances and contents were his own undisputed possessions."

a shot in the arm

A "shot in the arm" is a stimulus, something that revives a person's enthusiasm, energy, or confidence. For example, "Getting a new concertmaster was a real shot in the arm for the orchestra."

Presumably this twentieth-century term alludes to a stimulant administered by hypodermic needle.

The first appearance of the idiom in print is in a 1916 article in the *Lewiston Evening Journal*. The article revealed that in the upcoming presidential elections, war veterans could give politics "a shot in the arm."

babe in arms

A "babe in arms" is an infant too young to walk and therefore must be carried.

The idiom has been around since the Middle Ages. During this time period, women often carried their infants with them while they worked in the fields or performed other tasks. Today, the phrase is often used figuratively to refer to someone who is inexperienced or vulnerable.

bear arms

To bear arms means to carry weapons or serve in the armed forces. In Britain, it can also mean to have a coat of arms.

The right to keep and bear arms is a legal right for people to possess weapons (arms) for the preservation of life, liberty, and property. The purpose of such gun rights is for self-defense, as well as hunting and sporting activities.

The Bill of Rights (1689) allowed Protestant citizens of England to "have Arms for their Defence suitable to their Conditions and as allowed by Law" and restricted the ability of the English Crown to have a standing army or to interfere with Protestants' right to bear arms "when Papists were both Armed and Imployed contrary to Law" and established that Parliament, not the Crown, could regulate the right to bear arms.

In the US, which has an English common law tradition, a longstanding common-law right to keep and bear arms existed prior to the creation of a written national constitution. Today, this right is specifically protected by the US Constitution.

There is, however, in both the United States and Canada, a long-running debate over gun control legislation and the rights of individual citizens to buy, own and carry firearms.

brothers-in-arms

"Brothers-in-arms" is a phrase that is often used to describe a strong bond between soldiers who have fought together in a war or military conflict. This phrase is used to describe the deep sense of camaraderie, loyalty, and brotherhood that develops among soldiers who have shared the same experiences and faced the same challenges together.

The phrase may have its roots in the medieval period when knights fought together in battles and in the post-classical Latin *frater in armis*, a "brother in arms." The word "arms" is used explicitly in the sense of "weapons," ultimately originating from the Latin *arma*, which variously refers to troops, war, and the tools of war.

The expression is common in sports, with teammates sometimes calling one another brothers-in-arms.

British rock band Dire Straits named a 1985 album and title track *Brothers in Arms,* which often plays at military funerals. First launched in 2005, *Brothers in Arms* is also the name of a World War II-based first-person shooter video-game series. Several novels and movies have also featured "brothers in arms" in their titles.

A variant, sisters in arms, has also been used in much the same way since 1910, around the time when women were allowed to serve, though initially in non-combatant capacities.

call to arms

"Call to arms" is a summons, invitation, or appeal to undertake a particular course of action. The term is used to rally supporters of a cause, such as a war or a political movement. It can also be called a battle cry, a motto, or a rallying cry.

gentleman at arms

"Gentleman at arms" refers to *His Majesty's Body Guard of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen at Arms*, bodyguard to the British Monarch. Until 17 March 1834, they were known as The Honourable Band of Gentlemen Pensioners.

The corps was formed as the Troop of Gentlemen in 1509 by King Henry VIII to act as a mounted escort, armed with spear and lance to protect the sovereign, in battle or elsewhere. Henry chose his troop of gentlemen from cadets of noble families and the highest order of the gentry.

up in arms

If you're "up in arms," you're angry, openly rebellious, and ready to fight.

Originally, in the 1500s, this expression meant literally to take up arms against an enemy. It was being used figuratively by about 1700; Jonathan Swift had it in 1704, "All the men of wit … were immediately up in arms."

The original usage of "up in arms" was entirely literal. To be "in arms" or "at arms" was to be equipped with weapons and armor.

chance your arm

To chance your arm means to take a risk to get what you want.

The phrase has been recorded since the 1880s, but where it came from is an open question. It appears to be a soldier's term. In *The Middle Parts of Fortune* of 1916, by Frederic Manning, about the fighting on the Somme and Ancre fronts in World War I: "What does it matter if y'are killed? You've got to die some day. You've got to chance your arm in this life, an' a dam' sight more'n your arm too sometimes."

Some sources say that the phrase originated in a feud between two prominent Irish families, the Ormonds and the Kildares, in 1492. As the feud intensified, Sir James Butler, the Earl of Ormond, took refuge with his followers in the chapter house of St Patrick's cathedral in Dublin. After a while, Gerald Fitzgerald, the Earl of Kildare, tried to make peace. In order to prove that no villainy was intended and that his desire for reconciliation was genuine, he cut a hole in the door and thrust his arm through. Those inside could easily have cut it off. However, they didn't and the two families were reconciled.

It's a good story, but the dates are all wrong. If that was where it came from, we should expect to find examples in the four centuries between the feud and the first known appearance of the story in the 1880s.

in the arms of Morpheus

The ancient Greeks believed Morpheus (the son of Hypnos, the god of sleep) to be the god of dreams. So, if you're in the arms of Morpheus, you're sound asleep and most likely dreaming.

strong in the arm and thick in the head

"Yorkshire born and Yorkshire bred, strong in the arm and thick in the head."

This proverbial saying appeared in the mid-1800s. The names of other (chiefly northern) English counties and towns are also used instead of Yorkshire. It would be very easy, and tempting, to adapt to many places in North America.

the long arm of the law

The "long arm of the law" represents the far-reaching power or influence of the police and legal system authorities. This English expression began as "Kings have long arms (or hands)" and was listed as a proverb in 1539.

The phrase is intended to imply that, however far a criminal may run, the police will catch up with him and justice will be done. In recent times in the UK, where crimes like burglary are commonly not investigated, let alone solved, the expression is often used ironically.

Charles Dickens did much to popularize its use in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, 1841: "The gamblers…pursued their course with varying success, until the failure of a spirited enterprise in the way of their profession, dispersed them in various directions, and caused their career to receive a sudden check from the long and strong arm of the law."

arm in arm

"Arm in arm" literally means two people having linked arms, typically at the elbows, as a romantic gesture or one of friendship. The figurative meaning: to be closely involved with or allied to someone or something. An example of the latter is, "This candidate is arm in arm with the party's liberal wing."

alligator arms

This American idiom refers to the fact that alligators have particularly stubby limbs.

In the world of football, the idiom is used to mean that an athlete's arms

weren't extended far enough to catch a ball. It's more common, though, to hear it describe people who are particularly stingy, indicating their arms are too short to reach their wallets. For example, "Tom has a tendency to get alligator arms whenever we all go out for dinner together—someone else always ends up covering for him."

armchair general

An "armchair general" is a derogatory term for a person who regards himself as an expert on military matters, despite having little to no actual experience in the military. It can also mean a military commander who does not participate in actual combat.

The term was first used in 1900 in the *Ottawa Journal*. The term is one of a family of "armchair experts" or "armchair theorists", such as the armchair revolutionary, armchair warrior, or, in naval operations, the armchair admiral. It's also very similar to "Monday morning quarterback."

give one's right arm

To say that you would give your right arm for something means that you want it very much and might go to any lengths to get it. For example, "I'd give my right arm to own a horse like that."

The term is also worded as "cut off one's right arm for," expressing a major sacrifice for all but the left-handed. An Americanism from the twentieth century, it presumably was well known by the time Robert G. Dean used it in *Layoff* (1942): "He'd cut off his right arm for her, as the saying goes."

passage of arms

The *pas d'armes* or passage of arms was a type of chivalric martial game that developed in the late 1300s and remained popular through the 1400s. It involved a knight or group of knights who would stake out a traveled spot, such as a bridge or city gate, and let it be known that any other knight who wished to pass must first fight, or be disgraced. If a knight chose not to fight, he would leave his spurs behind as a sign of humiliation. If a lady passed unescorted, she would leave behind a glove or scarf, to be rescued and returned to her by a future knight who passed that way.

The origins of *pas d'armes* can be found in a number of factors. During the 14th and 15th centuries the chivalric idea of a noble knight clashed with new more deadly forms of warfare. Commoner yeomanry armed with longbows could attack noble knights anonymously from a distance, breaking traditional rules of chivalry, and cavalry charges by knights could be broken by the

pikemen formations introduced by the Swiss.

At the same time, the noble classes began to further differentiate themselves in many ways, including through reading the very popular chivalric romances of the 1100s. This romanticized "Chivalric Revival" manifested itself in a number of ways, including the *pas d'armes*, round tables, chivalrous adventure, and in increasingly elaborate rules of courtesy and heraldry.

There are thousands of accounts of *pas d'armes* during this period. One notable account is that of Suero de Quiñones, who in 1434 established the "Passage of Honor" at the Órbigo bridge in the Kingdom of León. This road was used by pilgrims from all over Europe on the way to the shrine at Santiago de Compostela. Suero and ten knights promised to "break 300 lances" before relinquishing the *pas d'armes*, jousting for over a month, as chronicled in great detail by town notary Don Luis Alonso Luengo. After 166 battles, de Quiñones and his men were so injured they could not continue and declared the mission complete. Suero de Quiñones became legendary, and was mentioned in *Don Quixote*, the 1605 satire on the notion of romantic chivalry out of touch with reality.

short-arm inspection

The phrase "short-arm inspection" is a military euphemism referring to the routine medical inspection of male soldiers' penises ("short arms") for signs of sexually-transmitted diseases and other medical problems. The term distinguished between a man's government issued firearm and his own "short arm."

Beginning with World War II, the military made visual determinations with regard to sexually transmitted diseases (primarily gonorrhea). Held early in the morning, men dressed in only their boots, helmet liners, and overcoat were summoned out of their barracks and ordered to line up for inspection by a doctor. The practice ended after the Vietnam conflict.

small arms

"Small arms" are firearms designed to be carried and fired by a single person, often held in the hand. Not to be confused with "short arms."

strong-arm

To strong-arm (or "put the arm on") someone is to use physical force or coercion to force them to do something.

Bullies strong-arm smaller kids into handing over their lunch money, and

powerful countries strong-arm weaker ones into cooperating with treaties and alliances. In the second example, a figurative kind of strong-arming is going on; there is no physical action, just the implied threat of negative consequences.

arm wrestling

Arm wrestling is a popular sport where two opponents who sit facing each other, with elbows firmly planted on the table, and with usually right hands interlocked, try to force each other's hand down to the table. Written records occur as early as the eighth century in Japan, although the sport may have existed long before that.

I had no idea that arm wrestling was anything more than a casual, personal competition, but it became a professionally organized sport in the 1950s. The World's Wristwrestling Championship, Inc. hosted the first official World's Wristwrestling Championship in February 1962. Arm wrestling gained national attention, with televised broadcasts and references in popular culture, including a Peanuts comic strip by Charles Schulz.

Competitive arm wrestling matches involve one or more referees and use specialized tables which include elbow pads, pin pads, and hand pegs. The elbow pads indicate the area within which a competitor's elbow must remain throughout the match; the pin pads indicate the height below which an opponent's hand must be in order to be pinned; and the hand pegs must be gripped with the non-wrestling arm and are used for additional leverage.

Injuries associated with arm wrestling occur most commonly between novices or athletes of significant strength difference. Most individuals experiencing injuries regain full function with proper treatment.

elbow

The elbow is the joint in the middle of the arm where it bends, connecting the upper arm to the forearm. It can also refer to something shaped like an elbow, such as a bend in a pipe, a sharp turn in a road, or macaroni.

Other definitions:
—the corresponding joint in a quadruped's forelimb
—the part of a garment covering the elbow

—to elbow one's way

Idioms in brief:
—give the elbow: reject, dismiss
—have sharp elbows: be very aggressive
—out at (the) elbows: shabby, impoverished
—up to the elbows: busily occupied with

bend the elbow

If you drink alcohol, perhaps excessively, you're "bending (or lifting) the elbow."

This American colloquialism for having a drink dates from the early 1800s with the obvious allusion to lifting a glass towards one's mouth with bent elbow. It was well on the way to becoming Standard English by the late 1800s.

elbow room

To have "elbow room" is to have adequate space to move or work in and can be extended to mean freedom to do what you want.

The phrase goes back to the 16th century and arose from the actual need to have room for your elbows at the table. If people sit too close, it becomes too cramped.

It was used in William Shakespeare's play *The Life and Death of King John*: "Ay, marry, now my soul hath elbow-room… ."

shoulder

Human shoulders are versatile ball-and-socket joints that are flexible but sturdy enough to allow for lifting heavy objects. The word is also used as a verb, for literally or figuratively carrying heavy burdens, or "shouldering" through a crowd.

Shoulder as a noun:
—the joint connecting the arm with the torso
—a cut of meat including the upper part of the foreleg
—the part of a garment covering the wearer's shoulder

—the part of a hill or mountain near the top
—the strip of unpaved land that borders a road
—the slope of a stringed instrument where the neck joins the body
—in jewelry, the part of a ring where the shank joins the setting

Shoulder as a verb:
—to push something (shoulder out of the way)
—(military) to shoulder arms means to bring the rifle vertically close to the right side with the muzzle uppermost and held at the trigger guard

Idioms in brief:
—a shoulder to cry on: a person one turns to for sympathy
—a weight off one's shoulders: a relief from worry
—be on someone's shoulder: keep a close check on
—have broad shoulders: able to accept responsibility
—shoulder the blame: assume responsibility
—shoulder to shoulder: united to achieve a shared goal
—shrug one's shoulders: show indecision or indifference
—straight from the shoulder: honestly, candidly

a good head on his shoulders

To say that a person has a good head on his shoulders means the person has good judgement and is able to make good decisions.

The origins of this idiom can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy where the concept of phronesis or practical wisdom was first introduced. Throughout history, various cultures have emphasized the importance of having a sound mind and clear thinking. In medieval Europe, for instance, intellectual pursuits were highly valued as they were seen as a means to attain salvation. Similarly, in Eastern cultures such as China and Japan, Confucianism placed great emphasis on education and moral development.

old head on young shoulders

The phrase "old head on young shoulders" describes a person who possesses a maturity and wisdom beyond their years. This individual is often seen as responsible, level-headed, and capable of making sound decisions despite their youth.

The origin of this expression is unknown. However, some sources believe that it originated from an old proverb that states: "An old head upon young shoulders makes for a wise child." The idea behind this proverb was that if a

child displayed maturity and wisdom at a young age, they were likely to grow up to be successful adults.
The idiom was commonly used during times when children were expected to take on adult responsibilities at an early age. For example, during the Industrial Revolution in England, children as young as six years old were sent to work in factories. These children had to display maturity and responsibility beyond their years in order to survive. Also, during times of war or political turmoil, children often had to take on adult roles such as caring for younger siblings or helping with household chores.

cold shoulder

The expression "cold shoulder" has been used, both in speech and writing, as a description of aloofness and disdain, a contemptuous look over one's shoulder. Overall, it remains widely popular as a phrase for describing the act of ignoring someone or something, or giving an unfriendly, disrespectful response, a slight, or a snub.

One source claims that the explanation is literal: keeping one's back towards, or in the least a shoulder between, a person one is trying to avoid.

A theory on the origin of this expression is often repeated: welcome visitors to a house were given a hot meal but those who weren't welcome were offered only "cold shoulder of mutton." This is repeated in several etymological texts, but there's no evidence to support this view and it appears to be an example of folk etymology.

The first recorded use of the phrase was in 1816 by Sir Walter Scott in the Scots language, in *The Antiquary*. The phrase began appearing in print frequently after the 1820s and Dickens used it in 1840 in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. By that time it had migrated across the Atlantic and appears there in a letter to the editor in the New England newspaper *The Bangor Daily Whig and Courier*, June 1839.

rub shoulders with

The idiom "rub shoulders with" means to come into contact or have a social interaction with someone, typically someone influential or important.

While its exact origin is unknown, it is believed to have originated in the early 19th century. A related idiom is "rub elbows."

One interpretation suggests that "rub shoulders" comes from the physical act of rubbing shoulders with others in crowded spaces, such as in busy marketplaces or social gatherings. In these environments, people accidentally

brush against each other as they navigate through the crowd. This physical contact creates a sense of familiarity and connection. Similarly, "rub elbows" implies close proximity or interaction with someone of importance or influence.

look over one's shoulder

The idiom "look over one's shoulder" is a common expression used to describe someone who is constantly worried or anxious about something. This phrase has its roots in ancient times when people had to constantly watch out for predators, enemies, and other dangers. In those days, people would often look over their shoulders to make sure they were not being followed by enemies or animals.

This saying has become popular because it accurately captures the anxiety that many people experience when they feel like they are being watched or judged. It also highlights our natural instinct to protect ourselves from harm by keeping an eye on our surroundings.

put your shoulder to the wheel

To "put your shoulder to the wheel" is to respond to a problem by applying yourself and working very hard and diligently.

The expression dates from the 1600s. At that time the wheels on wooden carts and carriages were large, quite big enough to get your shoulder behind. Roads were rutted and muddy and carts often got stuck and overturned. There was no service center to call—the only recourse was to turn the cart upright and heave against the wheels to make some forward progress.

The first use of the proverb in print appears to be in the English scholar Robert Burton's medical textbook *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621. The story he relates refers to Aesop's story *The Countryman and Hercules*. The gist of the story is that a waggoner gets his cart stuck in mud and calls on Hercules to help him, having made little effort to free the cart himself. Hercules berates him to make every effort to fix his own problem.

It's worth noting that, as well as coining this expression, Burton was a medical pioneer. His text was written for those suffering from melancholy, what we now call depression. As a lifelong depressive himself he advanced medical science significantly with his writing. He gave sufferers much useful advice and a new 'inward' way of viewing the condition, which was until then believed to be caused by 'black bile.'

put one's shoulder to the grindstone

To "put one's shoulder to the grindstone" means to work diligently and persistently on a task.

This advice is a mix-up of "nose to the grindstone" and "put your shoulder to the wheel." As a grindstone is a type of wheel, the confusion increased and another mixed-up masterpiece was born.

shoulder surfing

Shoulder surfing is a social engineering technique that is conducted by observing what someone is doing by looking over their shoulders. As a shoulder surfer with malicious intent, it's relatively easy to watch someone fill out a form, use an ATM or pay using a credit card when they are in a crowded place since it's fairly easy to stand next to them.

Such malicious behavior can also happen electronically, as attackers try to steal sensitive information from mobile devices. To prevent shoulder surfing, it is best practice to use a privacy screen protector on your electronic device and to be aware of your surroundings when inputting or voicing sensitive information.

Looking over someone's shoulder may seem like a relatively harmless crime, but it can have devastating consequences like identity theft, financial loss, and even a complete financial wipeout.

standing on the shoulders of giants

The expression "standing on the shoulders of giants" is a metaphor which means "discovering truth by building on previous discoveries."

The best-known use of this phrase was by Isaac Newton in a letter to his rival Robert Hooke, in 1676: "What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much several ways, and especially in taking the colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants."

Newton didn't originate the metaphor though. The earliest documented attestation of this aphorism appears in 1123 in William of Conches's *Glosses on Priscian's Institutiones grammaticae*. William writes: "The ancients had only the books which they themselves wrote, but we have all their books and moreover all those which have been written from the beginning until our time… Hence we are like a dwarf perched on the shoulders of a giant. The former sees further than the giant, not because of his own stature, but because of the stature of his bearer. Similarly, we [moderns] see more than the

ancients, because our writings, modest as they are, are added to their great works."

The 12th century theologian and author John of Salisbury used a version of the phrase in a treatise on logic called *Metalogicon*, written in Latin in 1159.

And, much more recently, Stephen Hawking stated: "Each generation stands on the shoulders of those who have gone before them, just as I did as a young PhD student in Cambridge, inspired by the work of Isaac Newton, James Clerk Maxwell and Albert Einstein." Additionally, Hawking wrote a book called *On the Shoulders of Giants*, which explores the major works of physics and astronomy that inspired him.

carry the world on one's shoulders

To "carry the world on one's shoulders" means to feel pressured because one has great responsibilities.

This expression comes from Greek mythology. It is a reference to Atlas, a giant who was punished by Zeus by being made to carry the heavens on his shoulders, and who is often portrayed with the world on his back.

Chapter 13 — Busy Hands

hand

A hand is the terminal part of the arm in humans and other primates, consisting of the wrist, fingers, and thumb, and is used for grasping and manipulating objects. It plays a crucial role in touch and communication through gestures.

Other meanings are:
—a unit of length (4 inches), to measure the height of a horse
—a style of writing
—a round of applause

Human hands have 27 bones, as well as extremely dextrous thumbs that make it possible for us to do things that very few other animals can do. Our hands enable us to pick up small things, hold a baby, pet a cat, speak in American Sign Language, chop vegetables for a salad, and many other things.

Idioms in brief:

—a big hand: enthusiastic applause

—a hand like a foot: a poor hand of cards

—a hand's turn: a small amount of work

—a hot hand: a winning streak

—a second set of hands: a helper

—a slap on the wrist: a mild rebuke

—an old hand: very experienced

—be like putty in someone's hands: easy to control

—can't find one's butt with both hands: incompetent

—caught with your hand in the cookie jar (till): found stealing

—change hands: transfer to another owner

—condemned out of hand: with no trial or discussion

—count something on the fingers of one hand: rare

—die by one's own hand: commit suicide

—eat out of someone's hand: be submissive

—extend the hand of friendship: offer a welcome

—fold your hand: give up

—give with one hand and take away with the other: what governments do

—hand (of cards): cards dealt to you in a game such as bridge or poker

—hand around (out): distribute

—hand back: return something
—hand in your dinner pail: die
—hand in your notice: quit your job
—hand it on a silver platter: give something easily
—hand off to someone: transfer control
—hand one a lemon: give something defective
—hand someone a line: deceive with glib talk
—hand-me-down: second-hand clothing (or anything)
—handpicked: selected with care
—handwriting on the wall: a warning
—have a firm hand: maintain strong discipline
—have it in hand: be well organized
—have someone in the palm of your hands: control them
—have your hands full: completely occupied
—heavy-handed: clumsy, insensitive, or overly forceful
—high-handed: overbearing or arrogant
—know like the back of your hand: know very well
—leave something in one's hands: give one control
—my hands are tied: unable to act, helpless
—overplay one's hand: be too confident
—play into someone's hands: give them an advantage
—play the hand one is dealt: make the most of it
—put your hand in your pocket: give money away
—put your hand to the plow: get to work
—right-hand man (woman): very important assistant
—set your hand to: sign a document; do something
—sit on one's hands: take no action
—stay one's hand: prevent from acting
—take your courage in both hands: be brave
—take your life in your hands: risk your life or livelihood
—the ace in one's hand: a major advantage
—throw one's hand in: give up (from poker)
—top hand: a skilled worker
—try your hand: do something for the first time
—wait on hand and foot: serve someone's every need

—whip hand: the dominating position

—with one hand tied behind your back: effortlessly

—with one's bare hands: using no tools or weapons

—wring your hands: show your distress

at first hand

When you do something directly, in person, you do it at first hand. If you've ever had a puppy, you've seen at first hand how much work it takes to train them.

You can read about a solar eclipse the next day, and even see photographs of it, but if you want to experience it at first hand, you'll need a safe solar viewer or pinhole projector. Anything that happens at first hand is direct and immediate, based on your own personal experience.

bound hand and foot

Figuratively, "bound hand and foot" means to be wholly obligated, unable to free oneself. For example, "These rules have us bound hand and foot; we can't even discuss the matter."

by hand

If something is done "by hand," it is made by human hands and handheld tools as opposed to a machine. For example, if you hem a skirt by hand, it means that you used a needle and thread with your hands rather than a sewing machine. Another example is, "You can make these drawings by hand, but computer graphics are more efficient."

hand job

A hand job is an act of masturbation performed by someone else's hand. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary calls it "vulgar slang."

hand jive

The "hand jive" is a dance associated with 1950s music, rhythm and blues in particular. It involves a complicated pattern of hand moves and claps. It resembles a highly elaborate version of pat-a-cake. Hand moves include thigh slapping, crossing the wrists, fist pounding, hand clapping, and hitchhike moves.

make a fist of something

Phrases such as good fist, better fist and poor fist all refer to how competent you are in attempting something. If you make a good fist of something, you're doing it successfully. But, if you make a poor fist of a task you are incompetent at it.

The phrase is first seen in the early 1800s. Robert Louis Stevenson, in *The Ebb Tide* (1894), wrote, "'I've a good mind to read you my letter,' said he. 'I've a good fist with a pen when I choose.'"

live hand to mouth

Living hand to mouth means having no money for anything beyond basic necessities. This term, which dates from about 1500, implies that one has so little to live on that whatever comes to hand is consumed. "I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth," wrote the poet William Cowper (1790).

get the upper hand

To get the upper hand means to take a dominant position.

A popular theory suggests that the phrase originated in American playgrounds, in the way sides are chosen for impromptu baseball games. The method is for one team captain to grab the bat at the bottom, then the other captain takes hold above the first's hand and they progress hand over hand along the bat until the top is reached. The one left holding the bat has the 'upper hand' and gets first choice of players for their team.

A second theory is that the person whose hand is uppermost when a couple hold hands literally 'takes the upper hand' and is the dominant partner.

'Upper hand' was not coined as a direct and literal reference to hands. The earliest citations of the phrase put the emphasis on 'upper' rather than 'hand' and they indicate that 'upper hand' simply meant 'above,' either higher in social status or physically above. 'Hand' was a synonym for possession. The Romans used the Latin word 'manus,' which translates into English as 'hand' to denote the power a husband had over his wife.

hand over fist

To do something hand over fist means to do it quickly and continuously, such as making a lot of money in a short time.

This term is probably of naval origin. The allusion in this phrase is to the

action of hauling on a rope. Many of the early examples refer to slow steady progress, which is exactly what could be expected if a ship were being pulled closer to another by means of a rope.

The term is now used to suggest speed and profusion, especially in financial dealing.

idle hands are the devil's tools

This proverb means that when one is unoccupied or bored, one is more likely to cause or get into trouble. In other words, "idleness is the root of mischief."

St. Jerome wrote, in the late 4th century: "engage in some occupation, so that the devil may always find you busy." This was later repeated by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales* (1386), which was probably the source of its popularity.

business at hand

Think of measures of distance:
in hand — within one's grasp
at hand — nearby
on hand — accessible but not close

So, "business at hand" means something to be dealt with quickly.

keep one's hands clean

To "keep one's hands clean" means to keep a distance from or avoid becoming involved with something that is considered unsavory, immoral, illicit, or illegal. For example, "John's got clean hands; he had nothing to do with it." This metaphor for freedom from wrongdoing dates back to at least 1600.

the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing

This phrase refers a situation where different parts of an organization are unaware of each other's actions, often leading to confusion or lack of coordination. It may also apply to two or more people within an organization.

Today this expression is nearly always used as a criticism. But it first appeared in the New Testament in an approving sense, when Jesus recommended not publicizing one's good deeds — not letting the left hand know what the right hand does.

one hand washes the other

This proverb is used to highlight cooperation between two people (or groups) to reach a goal that each has. Their goals aren't necessarily the same but by working together each helps the other attain it. One hand cannot easily wash itself but by washing the other hand, they both become clean.

The expression may have originated with Seneca the Younger (5 BCE – 65 CE). It is similar to other proverbs, like "one good turn deserves another" and "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

The notion is illustrated by *Drawing Hands*, the line drawing by the Dutch artist M. C. Escher, although that might be better expressed as "one hand draws the other."

get out of hand

When a situation "gets out of hand," it becomes chaotic and unmanageable. However, "out of hand" means "without thought," as in "they rejected negotiations out of hand."

Both phrases arose in the days when failure to keep a firm grip on the reins would result in a team of horses being "out of hand."

talk to the hand

The phrase "talk to the hand" is used to tell someone rudely that you do not want to listen to anything he or she is going to say to you. It is usually accompanied by the gesture of extending one arm toward the other person, with the palm of that hand facing the person being insulted, in the manner of the gesture to stop.

A slang phrase associated with the 1990s, it originated as a sarcastic way of saying you do not want to hear what another person is saying. It is often elongated to a phrase such as "Talk to the hand, because the ears ain't listening."

tip one's hand

I could say that "tip one's hand" means "let the cat out of the bag," but I guess it isn't fair to define one idiom with another.

To "tip one's hand" means to accidentally reveal one's intentions, as in "He avoided any comments on birthdays for fear of tipping his hand about the surprise party." This idiom is an allusion to playing cards, where tipping one's hand means to accidentally reveal one's cards (one's hand).

hands down

"Hands down" means to do something easily or without much effort, often used to describe a clear victory or the best option. It can also imply certainty or no doubt about something. For example, to "win hands down" means to win very easily.

The phrase comes from sport of horse racing. Jockeys need to keep a tight rein in order to encourage their horses to run. Anyone who is well in the lead can afford to slacken off by dropping his hands and loosening the reins — hence winning "hands down." This is recorded from the mid 1800s.

left-handed

In human biology, "handedness" is one's preferential use of one hand, known as the dominant hand, due to it being stronger, faster, or more dexterous. The other hand, often the weaker or simply less preferred, is called the non-dominant hand. We are generally either right-handed (90%) or left-handed (10%), due to a combination of genetics, biology and environment. Ambidexterity refers to having equal ability in both hands, which is uncommon, somewhere around 1% or less.

Kangaroos and some other marsupials show a left-hand preference for everyday tasks in the wild. Studies of dogs, horses, and domestic cats have shown that females of those species tend to be right-handed, while males tend to be left-handed.

Studies that track how Neanderthals brought meat to their mouths by analyzing marks on fossilized teeth suggest left-handers have been a 10 per cent constant in the hominid population for at least half a million years. An analysis of marks on 9,000-year-old tools found at an archaeological site in Belgium has corroborated that ratio, and a survey of 1,000 statues and illustrations dating back 3,000 years has estimated left-hand artistry at around the same level.

It’s thought that the two brain hemispheres are better connected in left-handed people, which may well confer an advantage in language use and some differences in emotion. Aside from that, it appears that human evolution's steady maintenance of this small proportion of lefties over millennia suggests that left-handedness must confer evolutionary advantages.

However, left-handers (also known as lefties or southpaws) commonly suffered discrimination through history because of their handedness. As much as humans may claim to like variety, they are highly suspicious of anyone different from themselves and they are also strongly inclined to superstition.

Although attitudes toward left-handedness have changed over the past 50 years, laws against preferring the left hand existed as recently as the 1970s.

Surviving linguistic biases hint at the extent to which left-handed people have been marginalized. For example, the Latin word "sinister" merely meant "of the left side," but over time left-handers were viewed with such suspicion that it gradually became synonymous with evil. In French, for example, *gauche* means both "left" and "awkward," while *droit* means both "right" and "straight."

Another pair of opposites, for example, is "right" and "wrong." Right in this context means good and correct. Wrong means evil and incorrect. Then there's right and left as in directions. Because right in its basic context is good, therefore left must be evil. So, not only are we led astray by superstition, but also by the language itself, because our minds love to make connections, to determine cause and effect. Unfortunately, we're swayed as much by superstition as we are by logic and we often make wrong connections.

Other definitions of left-handedness are: "marked by clumsiness or ineptitude" and "marked by uncertain or ambiguous intent." An example of the latter is the "left-handed (also known as backhanded) compliment," which is an insulting or negative comment disguised as praise.

Another word used for left-handers is "cack-handed," a UK slang term that means clumsy or awkward and often used to describe someone who handles tasks in a messy or uncoordinated way. "Cack" is Old English for excrement or dung and comes from Latin *cacare*, to defecate.

The use of "cack-handed" almost certainly comes from the very ancient tradition, which has developed among peoples who were mainly right-handed, that one reserved the left hand for cleaning oneself after defecating and used the right hand for all other purposes. This has been known in most cultures. Some consider it rude even to be given something using the left hand. So to be left-handed was to use the cack hand or be cack-handed.

If you're one of the 700 million left-handed people, who gamely struggle with scissors, tin openers, corkscrews and Qwerty keyboards, you'll have realized that the world is designed by and for right-handers. This is hardly unexpected news, since 90% of the population is right-handed. Until toilet paper became commonplace, people used their non-dominant hand, for the majority their left hand, for unhygienic tasks. This further embedded the idea that the left hand was dirty, and so were left-handed people.

Companies eventually realized that there was money to be made in creating products for left-handers. Starting in 1968, William Gruby began a shop

called *Anything Left-Handed, Ltd.*, which sold left-handed versions of items like kitchen appliances and watches.

In the field of education, into the 20th and even the 21st century, left-handed children were beaten by schoolteachers or parents for writing with their left hand, or had their left hands tied behind their backs to force them to write with their right hand.

While a right-hander could smoothly drag a dip pen across paper from left to right, that can't be done with the left hand without digging into the paper and making blots and stains. Perhaps no one has done more to level the academic playing field for left-handers than Laszlo Biro, the inventor of the ballpoint pen.

It's been found that left-handed students are known to have a significant edge in mathematics. By having more balanced brains, with right hemispheres that more effectively process spatial awareness, left-handers are also over-represented in the architecture and design professions. Their ability to navigate the kind of spatial shape-orientation questions found on IQ tests is also likely to explain why lefties make up an impressive 20 per cent of Mensa's membership.

Left-handers also excel at some sports. A recent database of 10,000 boxers and martial arts fighters, southpaws recorded a significantly higher win percentage than their orthodox right-handed counterparts. Fifty per cent of top hitters in baseball history have been left-handed, despite left-handers only making up 10 per cent of the work force.

In the Middle Ages, the Holy Inquisition considered left-handed people to be witches or in league with the devil to overthrow the church hierarchy, so they were persecuted, imprisoned, and even burned at the stake. The Christian Bible contains 100 favorable references to the right and 25 unfavorable references to the left and the church has always associated the left with underhand deception, immorality and illegitimacy.

The prejudice is still visible in superstitions to this day. When we throw spilt salt over our left shoulder we're trying to blindside the devil and empower our guardian angel on the right.

Joan of Arc may or may not have been left-handed, but propagandist depictions that implied she was a witch certainly portrayed her that way. Significantly, in early productions of Macbeth, the "weird sisters" would have entered and exited stage left, and stirred their cauldron in a counter-clockwise direction. During the Salem witch trials, a woman who was left-handed was much more likely to be accused of being a witch.

Albert Einstein, Leonardo Da Vinci, Beethoven, and Michelangelo stand out among the characters of history known to be left-handed. Talented sportsmen such as Lionel Messi, Rafa Nadal, Iker Casillas, and celebrities such as Angelina Jolie, Julia Roberts, and Tom Cruise are also on that list. Five of the last eight American presidents signed their executive orders with their left hand.

Left-Handers Day is celebrated on August 13. That day was chosen because of the superstitions that revolve around the number. Because it is associated with bad luck, a situation similar to that experienced by left-handed people, who were seen as abnormal, the idea was to shatter all prejudiced ideas around left-handed people. And, perhaps, to give a well-deserved slap in the face to superstition itself.

cap in hand

This phrase is used to describe a request for help, often monetary. To have your cap in your hand, and therefore your head uncovered, is a mark of respect and also of subordination. The idea of a cap as a begging bowl into which coins can be dropped may also be present. A North American version of this expression is hat in hand.

have to hand it to you

People use expressions such as "I have to hand it to you" or "You've got to hand it to him" in order to say that they admire what someone has done. People often use these expressions when they did not think that someone would be successful or when they do not usually like or approve of that person.

keep your hand in

Keeping your hand in means practicing a skill often enough so that you do not lose it. It can also mean to remain involved in something, often in a minor role or capacity.

offhand

"Offhand" generally means without looking or thinking, as in "Offhand, I couldn't tell you what the weather forecast says about tomorrow." It can also be an adjective, meaning casual or informal. For example, if you are at a wedding, you may want to make a few offhand (but nice) remarks about the newlyweds.

the hand is quicker than the eye

This phrase is an expression associated with stage magicians in reference to sleights of hand that seem to occur faster than the audience is able to perceive.

the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world

Women, particularly mothers, have a decisive influence on the future direction of society because they raise and nurture the next generation.

The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World is a poem by William Ross Wallace that praises motherhood as the preeminent force for change in the world. The poem was first published in 1865 under the title *What Rules the World*.

It doesn't give fathers much credit, does it?

an iron hand in a velvet glove

This description refers to a person who has a gentle, sweet, or unassuming appearance or disposition, but who in reality is particularly severe, forceful, or uncompromising.

carry fire in one hand and water in the other

The phrase "carry fire in one hand and water in the other" means to say one thing and mean another, or to try to please or support two opposing sides, often leading to criticism or failure due to a lack of commitment. A hypocrite.

dead man's hand

The "dead man's hand" refers to a specific poker hand consisting of two pairs: black aces and black eights. It is famously associated with Wild Bill Hickok, who was allegedly holding this five-card stud hand when he was shot in 1876 at Deadwood, South Dakota. History does not reveal what the fifth "hole" card was, although legend has it as the five, nine, or jack of diamonds.

The makeup of poker's dead man's hand has varied through the years. No contemporaneous source records the exact cards Hickok held when killed. Author Frank Wilstach's 1926 book *Wild Bill Hickok: The Prince of Pistoleers* led to the popular modern-held conception of the poker hand's contents.

The Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Homicide Division, the Los Angeles Police Department CRASH squad, and the Armed Forces Medical

Examiner System all use some variation of the aces and eights dead man's hand in their insignia. The Deadwood Police Department uses it as a patch on their uniforms.

hand down

"Hand down" means to pass something from an older generation to a younger one, often referring to traditions or possessions. It can also refer to making (handing down) an official decision or ruling in a legal context.

hand-waving

Hand-waving refers to making insubstantial or unsupported statements, often to distract, impress, or mislead others, especially in debates or discussions. It can also describe the act of glossing over important details or avoiding serious attention to a problem.

It is also used academically to indicate unproven claims and skipped steps in proofs, with some specific meanings in particular fields, including literary criticism, speculative fiction, mathematics, logic, science, and engineering. The term can additionally be used in work situations, when attempts are made to display productivity without actually resulting in it.

The term evokes the sleight-of-hand distraction techniques of stage magic, and suggests that the speaker or writer seems to believe that if they, figuratively speaking, simply wave their hands, no one will notice or speak up about the holes in the reasoning.

Actual hand-waving motions may be used either by a speaker to indicate a desire to avoid going into details, or by critics to indicate that they believe the proponent of an argument is engaging in a verbal hand-wave inappropriately.

Handwaving is used in literary, film and other media criticism of speculative fiction to refer to a plot device (e.g., a scientific discovery, a political development, or rules governing the behavior of a fictional creature) that is left unexplained or sloppily explained because it is convenient to the story, with the implication that the writer is aware of the logical weakness but hopes the audience will not notice or will suspend disbelief regarding such a macguffin, deus ex machina, continuity error, or plot hole.

The fictional material "handwavium" (a.k.a. "unobtainium," among other humorous names) is sometimes referred to in situations where the plot requires access to a substance of great value and properties that cannot be explained by real-world science, but is convenient to solving, or central to creating, a problem for the characters in the story. Perhaps the best known

example is the spice melange, a fictional drug with supernatural properties, in Frank Herbert's far-future science-fantasy epic, Dune.

hired hand

A hired hand is a person employed to perform manual labor or routine chores, especially on a farm or ranch. The term emphasizes that they are paid workers rather than permanent staff or owners.

This use of hired dates from the 1200s and referred to someone employed for wages as opposed to a slave or serf.

many hands make light work

"Many hands make light work" means that the more people working together on something, the quicker and easier it will be to finish. The opposite sentiment, of course, is "too many cooks spoil the broth."

This proverb was first recorded in English in the early 1300s in a knightly romance known as *Sir Bevis of Hampton*. It appeared in practically all proverb collections from 1546 on.

The phrase 'many hands make light work' was used frequently during the American Civil War in the 1860s in speeches and writings as a motivational slogan intended to drum up support for the war effort on both sides.

The phrase is often cited by The Scouts Movement, where group participation is strongly encouraged, and by humanitarian organisations such as the Red Cross and UNICEF for disaster relief campaigns. The phrase is also used in workplaces, in community organising, and in children's literature and media.

take the law into one's own hands

To "take the law into one's own hands" means to act outside the scope of the law to achieve one's own sense of justice, typically by killing, punishing, or passing judgment on wrongdoers. That is also called vigilantism. The idiom was first recorded in 1606.

Sometimes such action is taken by an individual or a voluntary association of persons to protect a common interest, such as liberty, property, or personal security, particularly in the absence of an effective law enforcement body. This happened fairly often in the old Wild West in the US. Sometimes the action is taken as revenge for the killing of a relative, which can result in a continuing feud between two groups.

The history of vigilantism in the US is as old as the country itself. In many ways, the history of the US began with vigilantism. On December 16, 1773, American colonists, tired of British direct taxation, took part in what came to be known as the Boston Tea Party. As part of the resistance, they threw 342 chests of tea into Boston Harbor.

During the 1830s, so-called "vigilance committees" formed in the South to protect the institution of slavery against encroachment by abolitionists, who were routinely assaulted, tarred and feathered, and otherwise terrorized by these committees with the acquiescence of local law enforcement personnel. After slavery was abolished, southern vigilante groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, sought to continue white dominance over freed blacks by using lynching and other forms of intimidation that were prohibited by law. During the second half of the twentieth century, African-American vigilantes wantonly destroyed symbols of white authority and property associated with white society in retaliation for the injuries and indignities caused by racial segregation and discrimination.

Vigilantism continues to metamorphose. Private watch groups patrol their neighborhoods. Antiabortion extremists commit deadly attacks. Environmental activists inflict economic losses on companies. In each case, vigilantes take it upon themselves to enact justice, rather than enlist police officers, lawyers, judges, and the rest of the established legal machinery to do the job. And, in each case, vigilantes risk starting a cycle of violence and lawlessness in which the victims of vigilantism take the law into their own hands to exact pay-back.

Vigilante justice is considered illegal and is not condoned by any legal system. Taking the law into one's own hands is a violation of due process and undermines the authority of the legal system. While the motivations behind vigilante justice may be rooted in a desire for justice and fairness, the actions taken can have serious consequences and can perpetuate further harm.

Not what you'd call a win-win choice.

Chapter 14 — The Fickle Finger of Fate

(finger, knuckle, palm, thumb)

finger

Humans usually have five digits on each hand. The first digit is the thumb, followed by the index finger, middle finger, ring finger, and little finger or pinkie. Finger stems from a root word meaning "five."

Aside from the genitals, the fingertips possess the highest concentration of touch receptors and thermoreceptors among all areas of the human skin, making them extremely sensitive to temperature, pressure, vibration, texture and moisture. Fingers help us sense the world around us and manipulate or move things.

The word is also be used to describe something, such as an oblong peninsula of land, as well as a quantity of liquid in a glass: two fingers of scotch.

Idioms in brief:

—finger to the wind: awareness of current trends

—finger-pointing: assigning blame

—five-finger discount: shoplifting

—have a finger on the trigger: prepared to take action

—keep your finger on the pulse: stay up-to-date

—ladyfinger: a small finger-shaped sponge cake

—lay a finger on: to locate; to touch

—my finger is itching: eager to begin some task

—put one's finger on something: discover the truth

—work your fingers to the bone: work very hard

—wrap around one's (little) finger: gain complete control

the moving finger writes

The phrase "the moving finger writes" expresses the idea that whatever one does in one's life is one's own responsibility and cannot be changed.

This line originates in English in Edward Fitzgerald's translation of the poem *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam*, 1859. Here is the relevant verse:

> The Moving Finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

This poem is better known today than any other of the Victorian era. It presents two principal themes. First, the idea that life is fleeting and must be enjoyed before the opportunity is lost; and second, the feeling of resentment against a Power that holds men responsible for a nature they did not create. To enjoy what one has, while one can, is the poet's solution.

burn one's fingers

To "burn one's fingers" means to harm oneself (especially by the loss of money) for some action, often such that one becomes unwilling or reluctant to do it again. For example, "I'm staying away from risky stocks; I've burned my fingers often enough."

Some writers believe this term comes from the old story about a monkey who persuades a cat to pull its chestnuts out of the fire. Others believe it comes from an old English proverb stated by James Howell in 1659 as, "Burn not thy fingers to snuff another man's candle." The connotation of interfering in someone else's affairs has vanished, and the modern cliché means simply to get hurt by performing any hazardous or foolhardy action.

fickle finger of fate

The "fickle finger of fate" describes the unpredictable and capricious nature of chance or fate, an Americanism popular during the 1930s. Sometimes the alliteration is extended to "fucked by the fickle finger of fate," popular in the US military during WWII.

The Flying Fickle Finger of Fate Award was a humorous trophy presented on the television show *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-In* from 1968 to 1973, recognizing dubious achievements by public figures or institutions. The award featured a gilded hand with a pointing finger adorned with two small wings and was often given to government officials for their ridiculous actions.

finger food

Finger foods are small, individual portions of food that are eaten out of one's hand. They are often served at social events. The ideal finger food usually does not create any mess (such as crumbs or drips or smears), but this criterion is often overlooked in order to include foods like tacos.

One kind of finger food is the French canapé, known since the late 1700s. Canapés began as slices of toasted or fried bread with various toppings. Their name, literally "sofa," was inspired from how the toppings "sat" on the bread as though it were a sofa. Over time, canapés became a word to describe all

finger foods served at parties.

A very popular finger food is the tapa, an appetizer in Spanish cuisine. They can be combined to make a full meal and are served cold or hot. There are several theories for the origin of the word "tapa." The one I think most likely to be true is that a "tapa," or "pot cover," of a thin slice of bread or meat was used by sherry drinkers in Andalusian taverns to cover their glasses between sips. This was a practical measure meant to prevent fruit flies from hovering over the sweet sherry. There are now many tapas competitions throughout Spain.

put something on the long finger

This phrase means to delay or postpone something for a long time, to procrastinate. It's derived from an Irish proverb which says that "If you put everything on the long finger, then the long finger will be too short in time."

butterfingers

A "butterfingers" is someone who is careless, clumsy, a klutz, or uncoordinated.

This phrase comes from the idea that hands covered with butter will be slippery, making holding on to anything difficult. There is also a dialect sense of 'unable to handle anything hot,' as if your fingers were made of melting butter. "Butterfingers!" is often jeeringly shouted at someone who has failed to catch a ball in a game.

One of the earliest references to 'butter-fingers' is in *The English Housewife*, by Gervase Markham, and published in 1615. Markham's recipe for a good housewife was:

"First, she must be cleanly in body and garments; she must have a quick eye, a curious nose, a perfect taste, and ready ear; she must not be butter-fingered, sweet-toothed, nor faint-hearted — for the first will let everything fall; the second will consume what it should increase; and the last will lose time with too much niceness."

Butterfingers is the name for a Canadian alternative-rock band. Doesn't say much for the guitar strumming, does it?

sticky fingers

If you have sticky fingers, you have a propensity to steal. This metaphor makes it seem as if valuables adhere naturally to a thief's fingers. The phrase arose in Britain in the mid-1800s and is used more for a petty thief than a

hardened criminal.

"At the fire last night, a good many petty thefts were committed—the 'sticky-fingered' folks no doubt thinking it a good opportunity to lay in their winter stock of groceries.
(*Daily Ohio Statesman* 13 Nov. 1857)

the finger

"The finger," (also known as "the one-finger salute" or "flipping the bird") means to make an obscene gesture by closing one's fist and extending one's middle finger upward, with the back part of your hand facing someone, generally interpreted as "fuck you." Extending the finger is considered a symbol of contempt in several cultures, especially in the Western world.

The gesture dates back to ancient Greece and Rome, used as a symbol of sexual intercourse, in a manner meant to degrade, intimidate, and threaten the individual receiving the gesture. Historically, it represented a phallus, with the fingers next to the middle finger folded to represent testicles. In the 1st-century Mediterranean world, extending the finger was one of many methods used to divert the ever-present threat of the evil eye.

In 2023, in a court ruling regarding a Canadian man who was accused of criminal harassment and uttering threats, Quebec court Judge Dennis Galiatsatos wrote, "To be abundantly clear, it is not a crime to give someone the finger," and, "Flipping the proverbial bird is a God-given, Charter-enshrined right that belongs to every red-blooded Canadian. It may not be civil, it may not be polite, it may not be gentlemanly. Nevertheless, it does not trigger criminal liability." The accused man was acquitted.

the two-finger salute

The two-finger salute, often referred to as the V sign, can mean "victory" when the palm is facing outward. In some countries, such as the UK, it can mean the same thing when given with the back of the hand towards the recipient.

It's also a military salute when performed with the middle and index fingers extended and touching each other, while the ring and little fingers are bent and touched by the thumb. The tips of the middle and index fingers touch the peak of the cap. The two fingers have been interpreted as 'honor' and 'fatherland.'

the three-finger salute

"The three-finger salute" is the computer keystroke control-alt-delete,

commonly used to force programs to close or the computer to restart. "I had to give the three-finger salute twice before the program would run."

More seriously, "the three-finger salute" is also a hand gesture made by raising the index, middle, and ring fingers while holding the thumb to the little finger. It symbolizes admiration, gratitude, and a solemn goodbye, and has been adopted as a sign of protest and resistance in various pro-democracy movements, particularly in Southeast Asia.

The three-finger salute is used by members of Scout and Guide organizations around the world when greeting other Scouts and Guides and in respect of a national flag at ceremonies. There are some variations of the salute between national Scouting organizations and also within some programme sections.

In his book, *Scouting for Boys*, Robert Baden-Powell chose the three-finger salute for Scouts to represent the three aspects of the Scout Promise:

Honor God and Country
Help Others
Obey the Scout Law

two-finger typing

"Two-finger typing," also known as hunt and peck typing, is a method where a person uses one finger from each hand to find and press keys on a keyboard while looking at the keys. This technique is slower and less efficient than touch typing, which utilizes all ten fingers without looking at the keyboard.

finger someone

To "finger someone" means to identify as responsible for a crime, especially to the police.

finger wave

A finger wave is a method of setting hair into waves by dampening the hair and using only the fingers and a comb. The style was popular in the 1920s and early 1930s and again in the late 1990s in North America and Europe.

fingers were made before forks

This proverb attempts to justify eating with one's hands instead of with utensils.

let something slip through your fingers

To let something slip through your fingers means to miss an opportunity due to inattention or lack of effort. It often refers to losing something valuable or important. The term is also used to describe allowing someone to escape.

not lift a finger

"Not lift a finger" means refusing to exert oneself in the slightest. Charles Dickens used it in his novel *David Copperfield*, the sentiment conveyed reflecting reluctance or outright refusal to help, underscoring the moral indifference of certain individuals.

snap your fingers

To "snap one's fingers" means, literally, to press the tip of one's thumb and middle finger together and then forcefully slide them apart, producing a snapping sound, often used to attract someone's attention or to accompany the beat of music.

tick (something) off on your fingers

"Tick something off on one's fingers" means to count or list items using your fingers to keep track of them. It is often used to indicate the act of enumerating or organizing thoughts or tasks.

bite one's nails

Literally, this phrase means to chew on one's fingernails and shorten them. Figuratively, it means to feel very excited, nervous, or afraid "That movie was real nail-biting stuff!"

hanging on by one's fingernails

If you are hanging on by your fingertips or fingernails, you are only just managing to survive or to stay in the position you want, whether it's on the edge of a cliff or in a political position. "The minister is said to be clinging on by his fingernails since the scandal."

knuckle

Idioms in brief:
—knuckle sandwich: a punch in the mouth
—knuckle-dragger: a strong, rather dimwitted person
—rap on the knuckles: mild punishment

near the knuckle

If something that someone says or writes is "near the knuckle," it is close to the limits of what people find acceptable, for example because it is sexually explicit or offensive to particular groups. In the late 19th century this expression was used more generally to mean "close to the permitted limit of behavior." It originated in the variety hall performances of Victorian England.

knuckle down

"Knuckle down" means to apply yourself earnestly to the job at hand. The phrase comes from the game of marbles, one of the once-popular children's street games. Players shot their "shooter" marble by clenching the marble in a fist with knuckles touching the ground, then launching it with a flick of the thumb. When it was a player's turn and his attention was elsewhere, he was reminded, "Okay, knuckle down." The game of marbles can also claim the origin of another widely used term — "for keeps."

A similar phrase, "buckle down" most likely came from the idea of tightening your belt before performing an arduous task.

knucklehead

A knucklehead is a stupid person, a blockhead, an idiot, or an inept person. It's an informal term that can come across as joking rather than insulting, depending how you use it. The word is uniquely American, coined in the late nineteenth century, but made popular in the 1940s by an Army recruitment character known as "R. F. Knucklehead."

knuckle under

To knuckle under means to give in under pressure; to admit defeat. The verb to knuckle originally meant "to bend down" or "stoop" (probably from a joint's bending), and by extension "to comply with" or "submit to"—it was so used from the 1700s on. The first appearance in print of knuckle under with this same meaning was in 1882. The allusion appeared to be with the subservient gesture of stooping with one's knuckles low down or on the ground.

white-knuckle ride

A white-knuckle ride is an extremely exciting or frightening ride where one's hands grip on so tightly that the knuckles appear white. Figuratively, it can mean to endure something in spite of feeling anxiety, such as competing in a close election.

knuckle bone

"Knuckle bone" typically refers to any bone in the knuckle of a human or animal, while "knucklebone" (one word) often refers to the specific bones used in games or divination, particularly the astragalus bone from sheep. Both terms can be used in different contexts, but "knucklebone" is more commonly associated with the game.

Also known as astragaloi, dibs, fivestones, or jacks, among many other names, the "knicklebone" game of dexterity is played with a number of small objects that are thrown up, caught, and manipulated in various manners. It is ancient in origin and is found in various cultures worldwide.

The talus bones of hooved animals (astragali) are found much more frequently than other bones in archaeological excavations related to a period starting from 5000 BCE. Astragalus, being almost symmetric, has only four sides on which it may rest and is an early example of the game of chance. Knucklebones are believed to be an early precursor of dice. However, different variants of the game from various cultures use other objects, including stones, seashells, seeds, and cubes.

The name "knucklebones" is derived from the Ancient Greek version of the game, which uses the astragalus (a bone in the ankle, or hock) of a sheep. Greek tradition ascribed the invention of knucklebones to various figures. Both the Iliad and the Odyssey contain allusions to games similar in character to knucklebones.

Modern knucklebones consist of six points, or knobs, projecting from a common base and are usually made of metal or plastic. The winner is the first player to successfully complete a prescribed series of throws, which, though similar, differ widely in detail.

palm

Palm refers to the inside part of the hand between the wrist and the base of the fingers. It can also refer to a type of tree that typically grows in tropical regions, characterized by a tall trunk and large leaves at the top.

In nautical terms, the word can also mean a metal shield worn by sailmakers over the palm of the hand and used to force a needle through heavy canvas, or the blade of an oar or paddle.

A well-known idiom is "grease someone's palm," which means to bribe them.

palm (something)

To palm something means to:
—conceal something in the palm of one's hand, as when stealing
—receive something secretly. "It turned out that the governor had been palming a percentage of the profits from companies she'd given preference to."
—grasp a ball, typically a basketball, with one hand by extending the fingers around its surface. "His hands were so big that he palmed the basketball like it was a baseball."
—conceal something in the performance of a magic trick
—pick up furtively

bear the palm

Palm leaves were formerly used as a symbol of victory, so to "bear the palm" means a win. The palm is still used as an emblem of reward — the winning film at the Cannes Film Festival (Europe's premier movie awards) receives the "Palme d'Or" or golden palm leaf.

cross one's palm with silver

This phrase is used in the figurative sense of paying money to someone for a service. Crossing someone's palm with silver was originally connected with the telling of fortunes, when the client would literally trace out the sign of a cross on the hand of the fortune-teller with a silver coin.

palm off

To "palm off" means to give away something or persuade someone to accept something, because you do not want it. It can also mean deception by substituting, as in "The salesman tried to palm off a zircon as a diamond." The term comes from the practice of concealing in one's palm what one pretends to dispose of in some other way.

thumb

Your thumb is the fifth digit on your hand, the one that doesn't quite match your fingers. Thumbs help us grip objects with care and precision — such as chopsticks. Our thumbs are much appreciated by cats and dogs because the thumb allows us to use a can-opener.

Humans are more dextrous than our closest primate relatives because of our nimble thumbs. They're opposable, so we can move them forward and touch them to our fingers. Some monkeys share this trait, and they're the best able to use primitive tools. Your thumbs make it possible for you to brush your teeth, write with a pen, and snap your fingers. You can also thumb through the pages of a book — in other words, turn each page with your thumb.

a pricking in your thumbs

This phrase means an intuition or premonition, a sense of foreknowledge about a situation, condition, or set of circumstances. It's used in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "By the pricking of my thumbs, Something wicked this way comes."

twiddle one's thumbs

To "twiddle one's thumbs" means to circle one's thumbs around one another, usually with the fingers interlaced, and usually done idly while waiting or bored. Figuratively, it means to wait or dawdle, to accomplish nothing useful, or lack a useful occupation.

put one's thumb on the scale

The phrase "put one's thumb on the scale" means to manipulate a situation in order to create an unfair advantage by deceiving others. It originated from merchants holding a thumb on the scale when weighing goods for sale, therefore increasing the apparent weight and price.

under someone's thumb

"Under someone's thumb" is an idiom that means "under someone's control or influence." It generally has a negative connotation of domination. The allusion is to a protagonist so powerful and a victim so insignificant that even the

former's thumb is strong enough to control them.

Some people have written or said that the term relates to falconry, but that is not true. The phrase, coined in the 18th century, was always used to refer to a powerful person, like a king or lord, exercising control over a subject.

stick out like a sore thumb

To stick out like a sore thumb means to be very conspicuous or different from one's surroundings. This simile is extremely apt, as anyone who has ever injured a thumb will testify. One tends to hold the injured thumb stiffly, and, since it opposes the fingers anyhow, it tends to stand out, thereby risking more bumps and bruises. Dating from the early twentieth century, it appears in print in Erle Stanley Gardner's *The Case of the Sleepwalker's Niece* (1936): "That's the one thing in the case that stands out like a sore thumb."

thumb one's nose

To thumb your nose (cock a snook) is, literally, to perform a rude gesture in which you touch your nose with your thumb and wiggle your stretched-out fingers to express contempt or a lack of respect. "He has thumbed his nose at authority all his life."

The phrase can be used figuratively. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a 1938 example in Eric Ambler's novel *Cause for Alarm*: "The Rome–Berlin axis…cocked the biggest snook yet at the League of Nations idea."

thumbnail sketch

A thumbnail sketch, in general, is a short description mentioning only the most important features. But in this digital age, the phrase usually refers to reduced-size versions of pictures or videos, used to help in recognizing and organizing them, serving the same role for images as a normal text index does for words. On web pages, they also avoid the need to download larger files unnecessarily.

The word "thumbnail" is a reference to the human thumbnail and alludes to the small size of an image or picture, comparable to the size of the human thumbnail. While the earliest use of the word in this sense dates back to the 1600s, the *American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms* reports that the expression first appears in the mid-1800s to refer to 'a drawing the size of the thumbnail.' The word was then used figuratively to refer to anything small or concise, such as a biographical essay. The use of the word "thumbnail" in the specific context of computer images as 'a small graphical representation, as of a larger graphic, a page layout, etc.' appears to have been first used in the 1980s.

Tom Thumb

Tom Thumb is a popular character from English folklore, first appearing in print in 1621. He is depicted as a tiny boy, no bigger than his father's thumb, who has various adventures, including encounters with giants and becoming a favorite of King Arthur.

Charles Sherwood Stratton (January 4, 1838 – July 15, 1883), better known by his stage name "General Tom Thumb," was an American with dwarfism who achieved great fame as a performer under circus pioneer P. T. Barnum.

thumb war

A thumb war or thumb fight, also known as thumb wrestling, is a game played by two players in which the thumbs are used to simulate fighting. The objective of the game is to "pin" the opponent's thumb, often to a count of four. The San Francisco Chronicle called the game "the miniature golf of martial sports."

The players face each other and each holds out their left hand or right hand in a "thumbs up," and they link hands such that each player's fingers curl around the other player's fingers. Players may not use any of the fingers except the thumb to pin down their opponent's thumb. Gameplay has several tactics such as "playing possum," aiming for the knuckle rather than the nail for a pin, going for a quick strike, and waiting for one's opponent to tire. There are other variations.

The game is typically initiated with both the players uttering the rhyme "One, two, three, four, I declare a thumb war," passing their thumbs over each other in time with this rhyme.

There is an official Ladies and Mens World Thumb Wrestling Championships which is contested by thumb wrestlers from across the globe annually.

Chapter 15 — Bold Face

face

The face is the front part of the head in humans and includes the forehead, eyes, nose, cheeks, and mouth. It plays a crucial role in identity and expression, allowing for communication and emotional display. Because of this, the word has spawned many, many idioms. It can also mean the outward appearance of things, as in "The modern face of the city."

Idioms in brief

—a face as long as a fiddle: denotes sadness

—a face for radio: ugly

—a face in the crowd: unremarkable

—a face like the back end of a bus: ugly

—a face that only a mother could love: ugly

—a kick in the face: a disappointing setback

—about-face: a complete change of attitude

—be faced with: be forced to deal with

—blow up in one's face: to fail disastrously

—eat (chew) (suck) face: kiss passionately

—face it: accept the truth

—face the day: begin the tasks one must do

—face time: face-to-face contact with someone

—face up to: deal with something

—face-to-face: in person, opposite one another

—fall flat on your face: fail spectacularly

—fly in the face of: deny

—fresh-faced: appear young and healthy

—get face: gain prestige or respect

—get out of my face: go away and leave me alone

—give something a face-lift: refurbish or improve

—hatchet face: a thin, sharp face

—have a face like a wet weekend: look unhappy

—have a face like thunder: look angry

—have a straight face: look serious

—have the face to: be confident

—hide one's face: feel embarrassed
—his face fell: suddenly looked disappointed
—in the face of: despite
—laugh in one's face: show open contempt
—on the face of it: to all appearances
—po-faced: disapproving expression
—powder one's face: go to the bathroom
—put a smile on someone's face: make them happy
—put on a bold face: make the best of things
—put on a brave face: act calm
—put one's best face forward: behave well
—put one's face on: apply makeup
—rearrange one's face: damage it
—say something to one's face: speak honestly
—set one's face against: be strongly opposed
—shoot off one's face: speak inappropriately
—show one's face: make an appearance
—shut the door in someone's face: reject them
—shut your face!: be quiet!
—stare in the face: confront directly
—stone-faced: showing no emotion
—turn one's face to the wall: to die
—what's-his-face: a man whose name you don't know
—wipe off the face of the earth: destroy completely
—with one's bare face hanging out: helpless look
—written all over your face: your emotions are obvious

as plain as the nose on your face

If something is "as plain as the nose on your face," it's very obvious. This phrase arose in the sixteenth century and is still current, heard even more than "plain as day," a nineteenth-century locution.

In the 1400s, people said, "plain as a pikestaff" (the staff on which a peddler or hobo carried his bundles).

facepalm

A "facepalm" is the physical gesture of covering one's face with one's hands. The gesture is found in many cultures as a display of frustration, disappointment, exasperation, horror, embarrassment, shock, surprise, exhaustion, sarcasm, shame, or incredulous disbelief. The word can be used as a verb, noun, adjective, and interjection.

So, we might call it an all-purpose expression.

Although the concept of the facepalm has existed for hundreds (if not thousands) of years, we do not see written evidence of the actual word until about 20 years ago. Images of stockbrokers facepalming have been widely used in the media to convey the dismay associated with poor financial performance, and a wide variety of regrettable film, business, and political decisions have been described as "facepalms" or "facepalm moments."

According to *Oxford University Press* lexicographer Susie Dent, this versatility is one of the reasons that the word has been linguistically "successful." It was added to the *Oxford English Dictionary* in August 2011.

This gesture is not unique to humans. For example, a group of mandrills at Colchester Zoo adopted a similar gesture to signal their desire to avoid social interaction or be left alone.

The facepalm gesture is a popular Internet meme to show a user's frustration or disappointment in an article, comment, or post from another user. It is often also used to indicate incredulous disbelief that another could make a statement that the reader considers unusually foolish or naive.

in your face

"In your face" is a slang phrase meaning rudely confrontational or an expression of extreme contempt. This impolite phrase apparently originated in basketball in the 1970s, and was used against one's opponents. By the 1980s it had been extended to other kinds of confrontation, where it calls up the belligerent gesture of putting one's own face close to the other person's. However, the term also is used merely to describe something that is quite obvious. The equally slangy "get out of my face" for "stop bothering me," originated in black English ca. 1930.

two-faced

Literally, "two-faced" means having two faces or plane surfaces. Figuratively, it means to be hypocritical, double-dealing, and insincere, as in someone saying unpleasant things about you to other people but being pleasant when they are with you.

The term refers to the Roman god Janus, who had two faces, one at the front of his head (looking to the future) and another at the back (looking to the past). In ancient Roman religion and myth, Janus is the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, frames, and endings. The month of January is named for him.

Janus presided over the beginning and ending of conflict, and hence war and peace. The gates of a building in Rome named after him were opened in time of war, and closed to mark the arrival of peace. He represented time because he could see into the past with one face and into the future with the other. Hence, Janus was worshipped at the beginnings of the harvest and planting times, as well as at marriages and deaths.

poker face

A "poker face" is a blank, emotionless expression that gives no indication of one's thoughts or intentions. Poker players use such an expression so as not to give their opponents any clues about which cards they are holding.

Bridge players (and those playing other card games) use poker faces, too, to prevent anyone guessing what kind of hand they hold. I suspect that anyone negotiating contracts does the same.

A similar term is "a blank look on one's face," which has a slightly different meaning. Such a look may be caused by emotionlessness, boredom, depression, or slight confusion, such as when a listener does not understand what has been said.

the face that launched a thousand ships

"The face that launched a thousand ships" is a well-known figure of speech and a snippet of 17th-century poetry that refers to Helen of Troy.

English playwright Christopher Marlowe wrote:

> "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
> And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?"

The line comes from Marlowe's play *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, published in 1604. In the play, Faustus is an ambitious man, who has decided that necromancy—speaking to the dead—is the only path to the power he seeks. The risk of communing with dead spirits, however, is that raising them can either put you in control of them or allow them to enslave you. Faustus, conjuring on his own, makes a deal with the demon Mephistopheles, and one of the spirits Faustus raises is Helen of Troy. Because he cannot resist her, he

makes her his paramour and is damned forever.

According to Homer's *The Iliad*, Helen was the wife of the king of Sparta, Menelaus. She was so beautiful that Greek men went to Troy and fought the Trojan War to win her back from Paris, her lover and the man who stole her. The "thousand ships" in Marlowe's play refer to the Greek army who set sail from Aulis to war with the Trojans and burn down Troy.

Marlowe is saying Helen caused the Trojan War. Today the phrase is most commonly used as a metaphor for beauty and its seductive and destructive force.

On the humorous side of the story, a "helen" is a unit of measurement based on the concept that Helen of Troy had a face that launched a thousand ships. The helen is thus used to measure quantities of beauty in terms of the theoretical action that could be accomplished by the wielder of such beauty.

In a 1958 letter to the New Scientist, R.C. Winton proposes the millihelen as the amount of beauty required to launch one ship. Others extended the values, where minus 1 millihelen was the amount of ugliness required to sink a battleship.

blue in the face

If you've talked about something until you are "blue in the face" and exhausted, you probably mean you wasted your efforts because you got no results. This expression alludes to the bluish skin color resulting from lack of oxygen, which presumably might result from talking until one was breathless. The phrase, as used in the 1820s, was "until one is black and blue in the face." The color black was dropped from the idiom by the 1860s.

your face doesn't fit

The phrase "one's face doesn't fit" means that a person's appearance or personality is not suitable for a particular job or social situation. It can imply that the individual does not conform to the expectations or culture of the environment. For example, "That girl's pretty enough, but her face just doesn't fit for a couture ad campaign."

bald-faced liar

A "bald-faced liar" refers to someone who tells a lie that is obvious, without any attempt to disguise it. This term implies a brazen or audacious lie.

A similar term is "bold-faced," which goes back to Shakespeare in the sense

of a shameless or impudent appearance. Another is "barefaced," which is the oldest of the three. Since the late 16th century, "barefaced" has described those having the face uncovered, whether by being sans beard or sans mask. Since then, it developed the meaning "open, unconcealed."

The term bold-faced got more popular in the second half of the 20th century. That was a time of increased use of word processing and the various typeface options it permitted, including "bold." The evidence is not conclusive, but one very large database of primarily news sources shows a dramatic increase in the use of "bold-faced lie" in 2008—and a dramatic increase in the use of "bold-faced type" during the same year. Coincidence? Maybe, maybe not.

Bald-faced is now decidedly the preferred term in published, edited text. Barefaced is still in use, but it's the least common.

laughing on the other side of your face

The phrase "laughing on the other side of your face" means that someone who is currently happy or pleased will soon be disappointed or unhappy when things do not go as expected. It often implies that the change in fortune is deserved.

not just a pretty face

This term describes a person with achievements, intelligence, skills, or abilities beyond an attractive face. Although the opposite of the phrase ("just a pretty face") always indicates physical attractiveness, this version primarily emphasizes a person's contributions, with the assertion of attractiveness often being intended as humorous. "Sure, I know how to fix your computer. I'm not just a pretty face, you know!"

Dating from the second half of the 1900s, the phrase was used for the title of a biography of screen actress Hedy Lamarr, which described her as a woman accomplished in many fields. In 2004, Democratic vice presidential candidate John Edwards, known for his good looks, was described as "not just a pretty face" by columnist Laura Lasky.

be the face of something

This phrase highlights how someone or something can symbolize the overall image or reputation of a larger entity.

dogface

"Dogface" is a nickname for a US Army soldier, especially an enlisted

infantryman. The term gained widespread use during World War II.

The term appeared in print at least as early as 1935. Newspapers at the time accounted for the nickname by explaining that soldiers wear dog-tags, sleep in pup tents, and are always growling about something and "the army is a dog's life...and when they want us, they whistle for us."

The nickname came to be seen as a self-appointed term of endearment for soldiers, but as an insult if used by others, such as US Marine Corps personnel.

duck face

"Duck face" refers to a facial expression where the lips are pushed outward (like a duck bill) in a pout, often seen in photographs, especially on social media. It is typically used to appear alluring or playful.

Fashion models frequently use exaggerated pouts, and self-portraits with a pouty face go back to Rembrandt. In the 1994 film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, one of the lead characters, Henrietta, is nicknamed Duckface for her pouty expressions.

OxfordDictionaries.com added "duck face" as a new word in 2014 to their list of current and modern words, but it has not been added to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

In animal communication studies of capuchin monkeys, the "duck face" term has been used synonymously with "protruded lip face," which females exhibit in the courting phase before mating.

Aha! So that's what it's all about!

face card

In a standard 52-card deck of playing cards, the term face card (US) or court card (British and US) is generally used to describe a card that depicts a person as opposed to the pip cards. These cards are the King, Queen and Jack. In some cases, the Ace is included.

In the standard packs of non-English speaking regions, the face or court cards may be different. For example, in Italian- and Spanish-suited packs there is a Knight or Cavalier instead of a Queen. In French-suited Tarot card packs, the Cavalier is a fourth court card. By contrast, German-suited packs typically depict an officer or overlord, known as the Ober, and a sergeant or peasant known as the Unter.

face-off

A "face-off" is an in-person confrontation, like the face-off between rival ice hockey players at the beginning of a game where each tries to gain control of a puck that is dropped between them. It can also mean a face-off between presidential candidates on a debate stage, or people or animals in contest or disagreement. The sports context is the way the word was originally used, dating from at least 1886.

face out

To place an article "face out" means to position it so that its front or readable side or most attractive side is visible, often used in retail to attract attention. For example, "I want all the bestsellers displayed face out on the shelves so that people immediately see their covers."

It can also refer to confronting a situation or person directly, especially in a challenging context.

face the consequences

To "face the consequences" means to experience the negative results or repercussions of one's actions or decisions, especially when those actions are expected to lead to punishment. It emphasizes taking responsibility for what one has done.

game face

A "game face" is a look expressing determination or resolve in the face of an imminent and difficult task, activity, or workload. "The thesis committee is going to be merciless, so be sure to have your game face on when you go in to defend your dissertation." It can also be an expression of stoicism intended to mask one's emotions or intentions.

Monday's child is fair of face

"Monday's Child" is one of many fortune-telling songs, popular as nursery rhymes for children. It is supposed to tell a child's character or future from their day of birth and to help young children remember the seven days of the week. As with many such rhymes, there are several variants. The following is a common modern version:

Monday's child is fair of face,
Tuesday's child is full of grace.
Wednesday's child is full of woe,

Thursday's child has far to go.
Friday's child is loving and giving,
Saturday's child works hard for a living.
But the child that is born on Sabbath day,
Is bonny and blithe, good and gay.

This rhyme was first recorded in A. E. Bray's *Traditions of Devonshire* in 1836. The tradition of fortune telling by the day of birth is much older. There is written evidence of it from the 1570s, but it was probably hundreds of years old by then.

put a face to the name

To "put a face to the name" means to meet someone in person whom one has only heard about or interacted with via other means such email or phone. Of course, one can also reverse that and say, "put a name to the face" for someone seen often, but whose name one doesn't know, such as a neighbor, or a clerk in the grocery store.

save face

To "save face" means to try regaining favorable standing after something embarrassing has happened. You can help someone save face by giving them an opportunity to avoid embarrassment, humiliation, or shame. For example, "I tried to offer an explanation that incorporated elements of what he'd said as a means of saving his face after such an awkward presentation."

screw up one's face

This expression means to contort one's facial expression, typically in a display of disgust, annoyance, or concentration. For example, someone might screw up their face when trying to read something difficult or when tasting something unpleasant. When little kids do it, mothers are inclined to tell them their faces will freeze that way.

throw in someone's face

To "throw something in someone's face" means to confront or criticize someone by reminding them of their past mistakes or failures, often in a hurtful way. It can also imply repaying an act of kindness with disappointment or betrayal.

face-plant

A "face-plant" is an informal term that refers to the act of landing face-first,

usually as a result of an accident or error. It originated from skateboarding and snowboarding slang, where it humorously contrasts with the intentional move called a "handplant."

face painting

Face painting, like body painting, has its roots worldwide in ancient history associated with cultural practices and traditions. There is some evidence that even Neanderthals may have practiced face painting. Unlike permanent tattoos, face painting is a temporary work that lasts several hours or even days as with the use of henna. Some archaeologists think that the use of cosmetics today may have evolved from the practice of face painting.

Face-painting is a form of entertainment found at local fairs, carnivals and, around the world, there are face painting festivals, conventions, and even competitions to celebrate this art form. Several galleries also promote body art exhibitions. Many professional face and body painters ply their trade for magazine publishers as well as the television and entertainment sectors.

Chapter 16 — Beaky

(nose, cheek, chin)

nose

The nose is the part of the human face that contains nostrils and the organs of smell. It can also mean the prow of a ship, the forward end of an aircraft, or a perceptive faculty such as "a nose for news."

Idioms in brief:

—a nose for something: natural ability

—always have your nose in a book: always reading

—can't see beyond the end of one's nose: preoccupied with oneself

—follow your nose: trust your instincts

—get up one's nose: annoy someone

—hard-nosed: tough, shrewd, and practical

—have one's nose in the air: be conceited or aloof

—in front of one's nose: clearly apparent

—keep your nose out of: mind your own business

—nose around: search, pry, snoop

—nose candy: powdered cocaine

—nose habit: an addiction of sniffed drugs

—nose in: move forward very slowly

—nose job: plastic surgery on the nose

—nose of wax: be easily influenced

—nosedive: sudden, swift drop

—on the nose: exact, precise

—turn one's nose up at: show haughty disdain

put one's nose out of joint

If something puts someone's nose out of joint, it offends or irritates them, because they think that they have been slighted, neglected, or insulted.

This term appeared in print as long ago as 1581 and has continued to be used in the same sense ever since. The image is a bit puzzling, since it implies that the nose can be dislocated (it can't—it has no joint), but that has not deterred its continued use. Shaw used it in at least two plays, *Major Barbara* and *Heartbreak House*. "The new bloke has put your nose out of joint."

brown-nose

To "brown-nose" is to try to curry favor with someone through servility, flattery, or favors in the hopes of getting something in return. The term arose from the implication that servility is equivalent to having one's nose in the anus of the person from whom advancement is sought. It is thought to have originated in US military or student slang during the 1940s.

hold your nose

To pinch one's nose between the thumb and finger to:
—avoid smelling or tasting something
—keep water from traveling up one's nose
—do something in spite of its unpleasant or illicit nature: "I don't want to get fired, so I guess I'll just have to hold my nose and do what he asks."

keep your nose clean

Keeping your nose clean means to stay out of trouble by not doing anything wrong.

This phrase originated from another one, "keep the hands clean," widely used in England in the 1700s. The phrase emphasizes the importance of hygiene, which has been recognized since ancient Egypt and Greece. It also meant to avoid corruption. Moral authorities of the time would have shuddered to use the word masturbation, but that is probably what they were getting at. When the phrase was adopted in the US, it became modified to "keep your nose clean," which literally meant to keep your nose out of what doesn't concern you. This new phrase then became widely adopted to mean avoiding doing anything shady.

Then, the American phrase crossed the Atlantic to Britain and has become something of a cliché of crime dramas. On being released from jail, lags (criminals) are warned by officials to "keep your nose clean and don't let me see you back here."

The early 20th century usage in the British Army appears to relate specifically to avoiding strong drink. Presumably the allusion there is to keep one's nose out of a glass or stein.

The earliest example found of the phrase in print is from the Kansas newspaper *The Globe*, May 1881:

"Mr. Lowell commenced railroading about sixteen years ago, as superintendent's private secretary, and by keeping his nose clean, brushing his clothes, and attending Sunday school regularly, he has succeeded so well…"

lead by the nose

To lead by the nose is to control someone and make them do exactly what you want. The expression alludes to an animal being led by a ring passed through its nostrils.

Its first use in English appears in a translation of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Gods* (ca. 170 CE). In the late 1500s, Shakespeare used the phrase in *Othello*: "The Moor … will tenderly be led by the nose as asses are."

look down one's nose

If someone looks down their nose at a thing or person, they regard that thing or person as inferior and treats them with disrespect.

One writer suggests that this term comes from a customary attitude of disapproval shown by lowering the eyelids and looking downward, thereby focusing on one's own nose. This explanation does not jibe with the body language involved in turn up one's nose, yet both expressions involve contempt or disdain, and indeed, to look down on has meant expressing contempt from about 1700 CE; nose was added about 1900 CE.

nosebleed section

The "nosebleed section" describes the seats of a public area, usually an athletic stadium or theater, that are highest and, usually, farthest from the featured activity. Such seats cost less money but have a restricted view. A common tongue-in-cheek reference to having seats at the upper tiers of a stadium is "sitting in the nosebleed section," or "nosebleed seats." The reference alludes to the tendency for mountain climbers to suffer nosebleeds at high altitudes.

nosy parker

A nosy parker is a person who is curious or pries into other people's business.

With phrases that include a word which might be a person's name, it's natural to try to find out who that person was. Sometimes this search is fruitful, as with Hobson's choice and Sweet Fanny Adams. More often, it is not.

The person most often associated with the phrase 'nosy parker' is Matthew Parker, who was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1559 to 1575. The problem with this theory is that the phrase 'nosy parker' dates only from the end of the 1800s.

Before 'nosy parker' was coined, a 'parker' was simply a park-keeper. The opportunities for park-keepers to spy on courting couples were no doubt ample and there has been some speculation that this may be the source of the term, but there's no real evidence of a link.

Was the first nosy parker a real person and, if so, who? We don't know.

A more recent and graphic New Zealand/Australian phrase with the same meaning is 'sticky beak.'

pay through the nose

To "pay through the nose" is to pay an exorbitant amount of money for something. The origin of this term has been lost. Possibly it alludes to the Danish nose tax, imposed in Ireland in the 9th century, whereby delinquent taxpayers were punished by having their noses slit.

rub someone's nose in it

If you "rub someone's nose in it" or "rub their nose in the dirt," you embarrass or upset them by reminding them of something that they do not want to think about, such as a failure or a mistake that they have made. This expression comes from the mistaken belief that the way to house-train a puppy or kitten is to rub their noses in their faeces or urine if they have made a mess indoors.

toffee-nosed

To be 'toffee-nosed' is to be snobbish, supercilious, or stuck-up. This British phrase describes someone who believes they are superior to others, especially due to their social rank or class.

The origin of 'toffee-nosed' has nothing to do with the sugary, brown candy, but derives from 'toff,' which was the slang term given by the lower-classes in Victorian England to stylishly-dressed upper-class gentlemen.

It is widely agreed amongst etymologists that 'toff' was a corruption of 'tuft,' being the ornamental tassel on an academic cap. Specifically, a tuft was the gold tassel originally worn on academic caps at Oxford University by the sons of those peers who had a vote in the House of Lords. The wearers of the prestigious tufts became known as tufts themselves, even having their own sycophantic crowd of wannabees, known as the 'tufthunters.'

Tufts were variously called tofts, tuffs, and by 1851 at least, toffs. 'Toffee-nosed' didn't emerge until the early 20th century. The 'nosed' part of 'toffee-

nosed' appears to derive from the idea of haughty toffs, who stuck their noses in the air when faced with the hoi polloi.

under one's nose

If something is under your nose, it's in plain sight. This expression, nearly always used as a reminder that something one cannot find or see is actually right there, dates from 1600 or even earlier. John Norden used it in *The Surveyor's Dialogue* (1607): "You are but a meane observer of the course of things passing dayly under your nose."

win by a nose

To win by a nose (or a whisker) is to just barely succeed. This term comes from horseracing where, from about 1900, it referred to a finish so close that only a portion of the horse's nose reached the finish line ahead of the second horse.

a camel's nose under the tent

The phrase "camel's nose under the tent" refers to a situation where allowing a small, seemingly harmless action can lead to larger, undesirable consequences. It originates from an Arab fable where a camel, once allowed to put its nose in a tent, eventually forces its entire body inside. Another way of saying the same thing: "Give them an inch; they'll take a mile."

nose hit

The phrase "nose hit" has two meanings.

—In the sport of curling, a nose hit is a hit on a stone on the point closest to the shooter. "Two well-placed nose hits in a row put the Canadian team in prime position for a third consecutive gold medal."

—The inhalation with one's nostrils of smoke coming from the burning end of a cigarette, especially one filled with marijuana. "They said that taking a nose hit would give me a better buzz than smoking regularly."

nose out

The phrase "nose out" also has more than one meaning:
—find something using one's sense of smell
—find something by careful searching
—defeat an opponent by a small margin
—move cautiously out of somewhere nose first

—drive a vehicle slowly and cautiously out of some place

nose test

"Nose test" is yet another idiom which has more than one meaning:
—an informal method for determining whether something is authentic, credible, or ethical, by using one's common sense
—an inspection of an object using the sense of smell, as for freshness of food
—an inspection of the nasal passages or a trial of their function, as for breathing difficulties

nose-burner

A "nose-burner" is very short pipe used for smoking tobacco or marijuana. The phrase can also be used to describe the remains of the unburned end (the butt) of a marijuana cigarette. "He kept trying to light the nose-burner in his fingertips and nearly set his moustache on fire."

parson's nose

The parson's nose (bishop's nose, pope's nose, sultan's nose) is the fleshy protuberance at the rear end of a bird, typically a chicken or turkey, where the tail feathers grow. The term is derived from the idea of an arrogant parson having "his nose in the air," similar to the shape of this part of the bird.

The expression originated during the 1700s, with Protestants calling it the Pope's nose while Catholics would call it the parson's nose. Since this is a very fatty and not particularly tasty part of the chicken, perhaps Catholics mockingly believed it was just right for the parson, while Protestants believed it was just right for the Pope.

put on the old nosebag

"Put on the old nose bag" is an idiomatic expression meaning to prepare to eat, often implying a casual or hearty approach to the meal.

Nosebag is a British term for the canvas bag used for feeding animals, especially horses, that is fastened on the top of an animal's head and covers its muzzle.

Wodehouse used it in his novel *Carry On, Jeeves*: "Biffy's man came in with the nose-bags and we sat down to lunch."

take it on the nose

"Take it on the nose" has three meanings:
—Literally, to be struck or receive an impact, especially a punch, on one's nose. "She swung the door open and he took it right on the nose."
—To endure or accept something negative, especially with stoicism or poise. "He just took the criticism on the nose and kept working on his art."
—To suffer the full negative effects of a defeat, setback, or hardship. "It seems like it will be custodial workers who have to take the budget cuts on the nose."

cheek

"Cheek" means:
—the fleshy part the face between nose and ear
—either of the buttocks
—insolent boldness and self-assurance

bring the roses to (one's) cheeks

This phrase does not mean buying a bouquet of roses and giving them to your cheeks. It describes whatever makes your cheeks look rosy or healthy, whether it's exercise, good health, or, perhaps, embarrassment.

turn the other cheek

To turn the other cheek is a phrase in Christian doctrine that refers to responding to insult with meekness rather than retaliating or taking revenge. In other words, if someone slaps you on the cheek, simply turn your face so they can slap the other cheek.

Some people believe that turning the other cheek is promoting peace. Psychologists believe it simply encourages the aggressor and heightens hostilities.

cheek by jowl

To say that two things are "cheek by jowl" is to say that they're close together, side by side.
It’s often used to describe cramped living or working conditions. The term is a very old one, dating back to the sixteenth century, when it apparently replaced the still older "cheek by cheek."

Chin

Idioms in brief:
—chinwag: an informal friendly chat
—stick your chin out: show resolve, determination, and fortitude

not by the hair of my chinny chin chin

This phrase is from *The Three Little Pigs*, a fable about three pigs who build their houses of different materials. The printed versions of this fable date back to the 1840s, but the story is thought to be much older. It's been extensively used in literature, music and television.

The story begins with the title characters being sent out into the world by their mother, to "seek their fortune." The first little pig builds a house out of straw, but the wolf blows it down and devours him. The second little pig builds a house out of sticks, but the result is the same. Each exchange between wolf and pig features ringing proverbial phrases, namely:

"Little pig, little pig, let me come in."
"No, not by the hair on my chinny chin chin."
"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in."

The third little pig builds a house out of bricks, which the wolf fails to blow down. The wolf then attempts to meet the pig at a turnip field, an apple orchard, and a fair, but the pig always arrives early and avoids the wolf. Finally, the infuriated wolf resolves to come down the chimney, whereupon the pig lights a fire under a pot of water on the fireplace. The wolf falls in and is fatally boiled, avenging the death of the pig's brothers. The pig eats the wolf for dinner.

The earliest published version of the story is from Dartmoor, Devon, England in 1853, and has three little pixies and a fox in place of the three pigs and a wolf.

keep your chin up

To "keep your chin up" means to remain cheerful in a difficult situation. This expression of encouragement originated in the Victorian era in America. In Britain, they would say, "keep a stiff upper lip."

The term has replaced the older British "keep your pecker up," current there since the 1840s, when pecker actually was defined in a dictionary as meaning "courage" or "resolution." The latter did not catch on much in America, where pecker is also slang for penis, changing the meaning entirely.

Chapter 17 — Bat an Eye

eye

The eye is a sense organ that allows living creatures to see by detecting light and converting it into visual images. In humans and many other animals, it typically consists of a spherical structure filled with jelly-like material, lined with a photosensitive retina.

Most animals have eyes, and while having two eyes is most common, some spiders have eight. The tiny hole in a needle is also an eye, and so is the center of a hurricane. To lay eyes on something is to see it for the first time, and when you keep an eye on someone, you observe them carefully.

Idioms in brief:

—a jealous eye: the gaze of an envious person

—a roving eye: an appetite for sexual variety

—a second set of eyes: another person to check things

—a twinkle in the eye: denotes happiness or amusement

—all eyes: fully attentive

—appear to the naked eye: seen with normal vision

—be up to one's eyes: overwhelmed by something

—bedroom eyes: a suggestive gaze

—catch a little shuteye: have a nap

—close one's eyes to something: willfully ignore

—cry one's eyes out: weep or mourn excessively

—do one in the eye: defraud or embarrass someone

—do with one's eyes closed: effortlessly

—dollar signs in the eyes: eager to make money

—easy on the eyes: pleasant to look at

—eye candy: pleasant to look at but superficial

—eye in the sky: overhead surveillance camera

—eyes glued to: fully attentive

—eyes like two burnt holes in a blanket: eyes ringed with dark circles

—eyes on the prize: focused on a goal

—feast one's eyes: look with great pleasure

—fish eye: a type of wide-angle camera lens

—for your eyes only: private

—four-eyes: someone who wears glasses
—from the corner of my eye: see indirectly or briefly
—give somebody the eye: flirt with one's eyes
—give the stink eye: look disgusted, disapproving, or angry
—goo-goo eyes: enamored expression
—half an eye: half-hearted attention
—have an eye for: interested, perceptive
—have eyes like saucers: be surprised or amazed
—have eyes only for: be interested in only one thing
—have scales fall from one's eyes: catch on
—have square eyes: watch too much tv
—have your eye on something: see something you want
—here's mud in your eye!: informal, ironic toast
—hit one right between the eyes: suddenly become obvious
—in the public eye: famous
—keep one's eye on the ball: stay focused
—look one in the eye: make confident eye contact
—my eye!: Nonsense!
—not believe your eyes: be very surprised or shocked
—not take your eyes off something: gaze continuously
—one's eyes light up: suddenly look happy
—open one's eyes: to realize the truth
—puppy dog eyes: wide-eyed pleading expression
—run one's eye over: scan something quickly
—see eye to eye: agree with someone
—sleep with one eye open: remain alert
—smack in the eye: sudden shock; strong impact
—spark in one's eyes: sign of one's vitality or enthusiasm
—spit in one's eye: insult or show contempt for someone
—strike one's eye: capture one's attention
—through the eyes of someone: from another's point of view
—wipe someone's eye: to defeat a person
—with an eye to: intending to
—with one's eyes open: with keen awareness

eye of newt

"Eye of newt" comes from the Song of the Witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The first part of the song goes like this:

> Double, double toil and trouble;
> Fire burn and caldron bubble.
> Fillet of a fenny snake,
> In the caldron boil and bake;
> Eye of newt and toe of frog,
> Wool of bat and tongue of dog,
> Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,
> Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
> For a charm of powerful trouble,
> Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

This song is the archetypal recipe for spells and enchantments and, in Shakespeare's day, a significant portion of the audience would have taken it seriously.

Some of these ingredients, such as "eye of newt" and "toe of frog," have become staples of witches everywhere. But what are those ingredients really referring to?

"Eye of newt" apparently refers to a mustard seed. Herbalists would often reference body parts when describing parts of plants. An "eye" is a seed, and mustard seeds are dark yellow, like the eyes of some newts.

"Toe of frog" refers to the bulbous buttercup. This yellow flower resembles most other buttercups but it has a fat, green, bulbous stem.

Almost all of the ingredients of that witches' brew are toxic plants used in herbal medicine and would have been familiar to Shakespeare's audience.

lay eyes on

To "lay eyes on" is to look at or see someone or something, especially for the first time. For example, "As soon as I laid eyes on him I knew he would be perfect for the lead in our play."

The term is also expressed as "clap eyes on" or "set eyes on." The expression is first recorded in a Middle English manuscript from about 1225.

in the blink of an eye

"In the blink of an eye" means very quickly, as in the time it takes the eye to blink or the heart to beat. The expression evolved from "in the twinkling of an

eye."

The earliest printed record of "in the twinkling of an eye" dates back to 1303 to Robert Manning's *Handlyng Synne*. Shakespeare later used it in *The Merchant Of Venice.* The earliest printed records of "the blink of an eye" is from Chambers's Edinburgh journal of *Popular Literature* 1874.

sharp eyes

To have "sharp eyes" is to have a special ability to notice or recognize a particular thing or quality. "He has a keen or sharp eye for detail."

"Keep a sharp eye on somebody" means to watch someone very carefully, especially when you do not trust them. Such an ability could also be referred to by saying someone has "eyes like a hawk."

keep your eyes peeled

To "keep your eyes peeled" means to watch very attentively for something, to be on the alert.

It may refer to removing any covering of the eye that could interfere with vision (such as eye lids) so that vision is unimpeded. This seems likely since an alternate of the expression is to "keep your eyes skinned."

Another theory is that the expression comes from the early days of the British police. In 1829, Home Secretary Sir Robert Peel established the Metropolitan Police Force in London, the first professional police force. Before long the policemen had picked up the nicknames 'Peelers' and 'Bobbies' because of the unpopular fact that they reported directly to Peel at the Home Office. 'Bobbies' remains as a friendly nickname. Peelers is not used but may have left its marks in the expression to keep your eyes peeled, as per their founder's instructions.

eye up

To "eye up" is to look over a person to evaluate and form an opinion of their appearance and demeanor or to show that you have a special interest, especially sexual. Also, of course, a dog may eye up a steak.

have eyes in the back of your head

This phrase means to be exceptionally alert and observant. It comes from the universal experience of encountering someone who seems to know exactly what you are doing even when his/her back is turned to you. It seems to apply

most specifically to mothers.

This expression dates from Roman times, appearing in Plautus's play *Aulularia* (ca. 210 BCE) and cited by Erasmus in his collection of adages.

dead eye

This term has two meanings:
—an item used in the rigging of traditional sailing ships
—an expert marksman

bat an eye/not bat an eye

To "bat an eye" means to display an emotional reaction. To "not bat an eye," of course, means the opposite, to show no surprise or concern.

The earliest origins might be from a 17th-century book on falconry. In 1614, Simon Latham wrote a book about hunting with trained birds of prey. He described how birds beat or flutter their wings when they hunt. He called this batting, which means fluttering.

In the 1880s, Americans started using "batting an eye" to mean flirty behavior.

bird's eye view

A "bird's eye view" is a view from a high angle as if seen by a bird in flight, an overall or cursory look at something. The idiom has been used literally and figuratively since about 1600.

Literal bird's-eye views can be aerial photographs or drawings and are often used in the making of blueprints, floor plans and maps. Figuratively, a bird's-eye view of music history, for example, may try to cover five hundred years of musical composition in a one-semester course.

a worm's-eye view

A worm's-eye view refers to the perspective of looking up at a scene from a low angle, as if you were a worm. This viewpoint can make objects appear larger and more imposing, often conveying a sense of vulnerability or powerlessness.

catch someone's eye

To "catch someone's eye" is to get someone's attention. Also, if something or someone catches your eye, you notice them because they are very unusual,

interesting or beautiful in appearance.

jaundiced eye

To look at something with a "jaundiced eye" means to look upon something with prejudice, seeing only the faults or bad side.

This term is based on the old belief that to a person suffering from jaundice (a condition in which the skin and whites of the eyes turn yellow), everything looks yellow. By extension, the jaundiced eye came to mean a prejudiced view, usually rather negative or critical.

more than meets the eye

To say there's "more than meets the eyes" means that things aren't as simple as they seem to be. There's a hidden significance, greater than is first apparent, as in, "This agreement involves more than meets the eye."

starry-eyed

This phrase means being naively enthusiastic or idealistic, failing to recognize the practical realities of a situation. Some young people get stars in their eyes because they become obsessed about show business. The image is of someone who is lit up with hope, so much so that his eyes shine like stars.

throw dust in someone's eyes

This phrase means to mislead or deceive someone by misrepresentation or distraction.

The term, already known in ancient Roman times, comes from the practice of soldiers confounding the enemy by literally throwing dust or sand in the air, creating a primitive kind of smoke screen. By Benjamin Franklin's time the term was being used figuratively. "It required a long discourse to throw dust in the eyes of common sense," he wrote (*Works*, 1767).

what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve

This idiom means that what you don't know can't hurt you. Unknown facts do not cause worries and grief.

Of course, one can "turn a blind eye" and have full knowledge of what they are refusing to examine. This is a poetic spin on "out of sight, out of mind."

eye-rolling

"Eye-rolling" is the action or gesture of turning the eyes upward as an expression of annoyance, exasperation, or disbelief.

Eye-rolling has been present in literature since at least the 1500s, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Shakespeare sometimes used the gesture to portray lust or passion for another character. In his time, eye-rolling was used commonly as an expression of desire or flirtation, and went on being used in this way in literature up until about the 1950s.

The action of looking away in rejection or disapproval has been traced to many different cultures, who use eye-rolling for similar purposes.

Roll your eyes at this one: the town of Elmhurst, Illinois, tried to legally ban eye-rolling. In 2010, the Chicago suburb attempted to include eye-rolling under the charge of "disorderly conduct" after a resident rolled her eyes at a council member during a meeting.

get a black eye

To "get a black eye" means having discolored flesh around the eye resulting from a blow or figuratively to mean to suffer a defeat. It can also be a moral blemish, an injury to the prestige of someone, as in "That kind of behavior can give us all a black eye."

turn a blind eye

Turning a blind eye means intentionally ignoring something, making an allowance, bending the rules, or stretching a point.

The expression is often said to have been invented by a British naval officer. In 1801, Lord Horatio Nelson, second in command of the English fleet, was besieging Copenhagen. The flagship had sent up signals for the fleet to withdraw, but Nelson wanted badly to attack. He had lost the sight of one eye at Calvi, so he put the glass to his blind eye and told his lieutenant he could see no signals to withdraw. His attack forced the French to surrender, a major victory.

But the *Oxford English Dictionary* records usage of the phrase as early as 1798, which means that Nelson wasn't the first to use 'turn a blind eye,' if he did, indeed, use those exact words.

a fresh eye

"Seeing with fresh eyes" means seeing familiar things as if you've never seen

them before, with the same sense of newness and discovery that you presumably experienced the first time you saw them.

"A fresh eye" can also mean having another person examine or critique something. For a writer, her editor is the "fresh eye."

The phrase has been ascribed to Marcel Proust: "The real voyage of discovery lies not in seeking new lands but in seeing with fresh eyes."

evil eye

The "evil eye" is a curse that's unleashed by a glance or a stare. It's born of envy and jealousy, but also of resentment, anger or greed. Most of the time, the curse is intentional, but it can also be roused unintentionally.

For thousands of years, people have believed that to achieve too much success would be to invite the anger or envy of the gods, who would then cast an "evil eye," cursing the unfortunate individual with a reversal of fortune. In response, people across the ancient Mediterranean began fashioning amulets and beads with an image of an "evil eye," sometimes called nazars, which would then help ward off that horrible, untoward fate.

The evil eye has its roots in magical thinking and superstition. Let's say that a person experiences bad luck, ill health, accident, or some unexplained calamity — perhaps a drought or an infectious disease. Before science could explain weather patterns and germ theory, any bad event for which there was not an obvious cause might be blamed on a curse. Curses, including the evil eye, are an answer to the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people.

The oldest evil eye talismans discovered by archeologists are the so-called "eye idols" excavated from the ancient Mesopotamian city of Tell Brak in modern-day Syria. The small figures, carved out of gypsum, have oversized eyes and functioned as protective idols against the evil eye as far back as 3300 BCE.

As for the blue-and white "glass eye" beads and other nazar amulets sold in Mediterranean marketplaces, historians believe they started as the blue-hued Eyes of Horus from Egypt, then evolved and spread throughout the region.

The concentric blue and white circles representing an evil eye are found on the prows of boats and elsewhere; in some forms of the folklore, the staring eyes are supposed to bend the malicious gaze back to the sorcerer.

The evil eye or *Mal de Ojo* has been deeply embedded in Spanish popular

culture throughout its history and Spain is the origin of this superstition in Latin America. In Mexico and Central America, infants are considered at special risk for the evil eye and are often given an amulet bracelet as protection, typically with an eye-like spot painted on the amulet.

a friend's eye is a good mirror

This Irish proverb means that a friend can impart an honest opinion. The saying suggests that a true friend reflects your true self back to you, often providing honest feedback that you may need to hear.

have an eye for the main chance

To "have an eye for the main chance" is to be continuously seeking opportunities to advance oneself or make money. The term often refers to someone who is ambitious without consideration of others. The "main chance" means the most important issue.

The term is thought to come either from betting in cockfights (main being an obsolete word for cockfight) or from a game of chance called hazard, in which the main signified the number called by the caster before the dice were thrown. In any event, the expression dates from the 1500s, was recorded by John Lyly and Shakespeare, among others, and appeared in John Ray's English Proverbs of 1670.

eye opener

An "eye opener" is a startling or shocking revelation. This expression alludes to widening one's eyes with surprise. It has also been used to mean a strong alcoholic drink taken early in the morning to jolt one awake.

eyes down for a full house

"Eyes down for a full house" is a phrase used to announce the start of a bingo game, indicating players should focus on their cards as they aim to complete a full house, which means marking off all numbers to win. It can also be humorously used in other contexts, such as childbirth, to signal that something significant is about to happen.

in the eye of the storm

Figuratively, this idiom means being at the center of or deeply involved in an especially difficult, stressful, or hectic situation or period of time.

The phrase "eye of the storm" has its roots in meteorology, describing the

central region of a tropical cyclone or hurricane. In this context, the "eye" refers to the calm center of the storm, where conditions are relatively peaceful compared to the surrounding violent winds and rains.

mean enough to steal a penny off a dead man's eyes

A person who is "mean enough to steal a penny off a dead man's eyes" is extremely miserly, avaricious, or stingy.

To keep a deceased's eyes closed, undertakers or whoever tended the body placed coins on the eyes.

The saying likely refers to the payment to Charon, the ferryman of the underworld, (in Greek mythology) to ferry the deceased across the River Styx (or Acheron), to his destination in the underworld. To pay the ferryman, the deceased person's relatives place an obol on each eye of the deceased (or in the mouth). Even so, Charon would not deliver the person across the Styx unless the body had had a proper burial.

not a dry eye in the house

The idiom "not a dry eye in the house" means that everyone (or almost everyone) present is very emotional, often to the point of crying, usually in response to something sad or moving.

red-eye

The phrase "red-eye" describes:
—cheap whiskey
—a subject's eyes appearing red in a color photograph taken with a flash
—a late-night or overnight aviation flight

The term derives from red eyes as a symptom of fatigue or a hangover.

roll snake eyes

To "roll snake eyes" is to throw two dice and have each one show a single pip on its top face. This term is common in gambling games involving dice, such as craps. The expression most likely originated around the 1930s.

The term snake eyes probably comes from the appearance of the single black dot in each die. Together, the two dice, each with one dot showing, can resemble the eyes of a snake.

shut one's eyes and think of England

The phrase "shut one's eyes and think of England" refers to the idea of enduring unwanted sexual intercourse, particularly as advice given to a reluctant wife to accept her husband's advances as a marital duty. It reflects historical attitudes towards marriage and sexuality in Victorian England. The phrase certainly has the moral tone of many Victorian maxims that emphasized effort and forbearance.

The idea of an unpleasant experience being moderated by dreams of the green and pleasant land may have been inspired by the poem *In A Strange Land*, which was published anonymously, but presumably by a homesick ex-patriot, in the New Zealand newspaper *The Evening Post*, in February 1905:

> Oh, to lie awake at night and think of England,
> Out of reach and far away;
> Oh, to see her in the distance as a picture,
> And let your fancy play.

Marriage was a route to economic security for women in Edwardian England and many must have seen the granting of sexual favors as an unwelcome price to pay for it.

the eye of the tiger

This relatively modern phrase describes the focus, determination, and self-confidence one needs in order to succeed, especially in the face of intense challenge or hardship. It was popularized by the 1982 song of the same name by the band *Survivor*.

hairy eyeball

The term "hairy eyeball" refers to a look that expresses disapproval, disgust, or suspicion. It means looking at somebody with your eyes slightly closed and your head tilted down so that your eye is partly covered by your eyelashes. "He gave me a hairy eyeball and waited for me to wilt."

The expression arose in America in the 1960s. The first time it appeared in print was in a newspaper interview with the comedian, Carol Burnett, who said that it was used in the sense of sexual attraction rather than disapproval. However, that meaning disappeared within a couple of years and the current meaning took over. To "eyeball" someone is an older American expression meaning to stare at or identify someone.

It's likely that eyelashes are the source of the idiom. They may have originally fluttered, but in the standard sense now, it means looking with narrowed eyes through the lashes in displeasure or dislike.

Chapter 18 — Big Ears

ear

The term "ear" refers to the organ on each side of the head that allows people and other animals to hear sounds. It consists of three main parts: the outer ear, middle ear, and inner ear, and also plays a role in balance. A completely different kind of ear is an ear of corn, the part that holds the seeds or kernels.

Idioms in brief:

—a hungry belly has no ears: can't focus on anything but food

—be all ears: listen eagerly and attentively

—blow it out your ear: leave me alone!

—can't believe your ears: very surprised or shocked

—chew one's ear: reprimand severely

—close one's ears: refuse to listen

—ear bashing: angry scolding or harangue

—ear for music: good at understanding the sounds

—ear hustle: eavesdropping

—ear-duster: someone apt to gossip

—ear-splitting: sound so loud that it hurts your ears

—get one's ears lowered: get a haircut that reveals the ears

—get someone's ear: get someone's attention

—give someone a thick ear: hit them on the ear

—grate on the ear: irritate or annoy

—grin from ear to ear: look extremely happy

—have steam coming out of one's ears: be very angry

—head over ears: be deeply involved in something,

—lend an ear: listen attentively

—like trying to scratch your ear with your elbow: impossible

—listen with only half an ear: not listen closely

—not much between the ears: stupid

—perk up one's ears: become alert and attentive

—pour honey in one's ear: praise or flatter

—talk one's ear off: talk for a very long time

—toss out on one's ear: eject, remove, or dismiss

—within earshot: close by

ear candy

"Ear candy" is light popular music that has an instant appeal but no lasting impact or significance.

The term made its debut as the title of a 1977 album by pop singer Helen Reddy. The album has long since faded from the charts, but the phrase endures and it is now used widely enough to have gained entry into abridged dictionaries. Although "ear candy" is sometimes used critically to describe tunes that are considered sweet or saccharine, the people who make the music and their fans find it tasty. As one 90s band member sagely put it, does it really matter if ear candy "isn't about the secret of life"?

Candy is actually an old word. It is first recorded in print in the 1420 cookery book *The Liber cure Cocorum*. The book is quite a shock to the senses for anyone familiar with modern-day cook-books. There are no pictures, of course, but the book is written throughout in rhyming couplets. Here's a recipe for frumenty (a fermented wheat dish):

With sugur candy, you may hit dowce,
If hit be served in grete lordys howce.
[When serving frumente in a great lord's house, you may sweeten it with sugar candy]

Candy was known to Shakespeare as *caudie*, and referred to it in *Henry IV*.

set something on its ear

To "set something on its ear" is to cause a sensation, to dramatically alter, distort, or upend expectations. It can mean to innovate or alter something, such as a field or activity, in an unexpected or unprecedented way. For example, "His early recordings set the jazz world on its ear."

a word in one's ear

If you suggest to a friend that you'd like a word in his ear, you're saying you want a private, perhaps brief, communication, often to issue a suggestion or warning.

Sometimes the suggestion is phrased as wanting a word in her "shell-like ear." This term appears to have arisen in the 1800s. An example appears as romantic fiction from the US, from the *Mckean County Miner*, Smethport, Pennsylvania, February 1878:

"Without a word he clasped Miss Patterson in his arms. 'My darling!' was all he said. She struggled to free herself, strongly at first: but as he whispered

something in the crimson shell-like ear close to his trembling lips, the pretty head sank upon his shoulder…"

I guess this is what passed for a bodice-ripper in the 1800s.

keep an ear to the ground

To "keep an ear to the ground" means to pay attention to everything that is happening around you and to what people are saying.

The allusion here is apparently to the days of cowboys and Indians, when one literally put one's ear to the ground in order to hear the sound of horses galloping miles away. An Americanism dating from the late nineteenth century, the term was a cliché by the time Stanley Walker poked fun at it in *The Uncanny Knacks of Mr. Doherty* (1941): "He had his ear to the ground and his eye on the ball while they were sitting on the fence."

put a flea in someone's ear

Putting a flea in someone's ear is a reprimand. For example, "If he doesn't bring the right equipment, I'll put a flea in his ear." This expression originated in French and has been used in English since the 1400s.

This idiom is derived from a fourteenth century French term, which meant filling someone with sexual desire. When first used in English, the term was used to mean a feeling of spiritual emotion. Of course, the French and the English always had to be different. Today, in Dutch, it's a way to say that you're fidgety or restless.

To have a flea literally inserted in your ear would be horrible, especially if it decided to bite.

earworm

An "earworm" (sticky music or stuck song syndrome) is a catchy song or tune that runs continually through a person's mind.

According to research done in 2016 by the American Psychological Association, earworm songs usually have a fast-paced tempo and an easy-to-remember melody. Therefore, they're played more than other songs and are usually at the top of the charts. And, thus, stuck in our heads.

"Earworm" is centuries old in English, but the word first referred to the earwig, which got its name from the (totally wrong) belief that they crawled into people's ears.

Our use of earworm to refer to the earwig began to fade in the 19th century, when the word earworm in English began to be used of a destructive moth larva which bored into the ears of corn (and also destroyed tomatoes, tobacco, and cotton bolls). The earworm flourished as an agricultural pest, and this was the primary meaning of the English earworm through the 1800s and 1900s.

Though the use of earworm for a song stuck in your head first showed up in English in the early 1980s, it was popularized by Stephen King (EW.com, 17 April 2009):

"A couple of months ago, I woke up at three in the morning, thirsty as hell (probably because I'd donated blood the day before), and shambled into the bathroom for a glass of water. I was 20 percent awake at best. And as I turned on the faucet, I realized I was singing this: "They say a man should always dress/For the job he wants/So why'm I dressed up like a pirate/In this restaurant?"

"Dear God, I thought, I've been infected by an earworm.

"My friend the Longhair says that's what you call songs that burrow into your head and commence chewing your brains. The dreaded earworm can turn even a great song into something you'd run from, screaming at the top of your lungs. If only you could."

lend me your ears

Saying "lend me your ears" is asking politely for someone's attention.

The phrase is first used in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, where Mark Antony says, "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears."

Antony has been allowed by Brutus and the other conspirators to make a funeral oration for Caesar on condition that he will not blame them for Caesar's death. However, while Antony's speech begins by justifying the actions of Brutus and the assassins, Antony uses rhetoric and genuine reminders to ultimately portray Caesar in such a positive light that the crowd is enraged against the conspirators.

The speech is a famous example of the use of emotionally charged rhetoric.

do not hang noodles on my ears

"Do not hang noodles on my ears" is a Russian-language idiom that means "don't deceive or fool me." According to journalist Alexander Kleimenov, in both Russian and Ukrainian, it is similar to the English expression "to pull somebody's leg."

The origin of the phrase is uncertain. One theory is that it derives from criminal jargon where an "ear" was a street informant and a "noodle" was a rope or cloth that could be used to tie someone up.

Zaur Zugumov, a famous pickpocket, compiled a book of criminal argot in which he lists an expression "to move lapsha (a Russian noodle) onto ears" which means to tell lies without particular profit, just for entertainment, to make time go faster in detention. He says the expression has been in use since the time of the Russian Empire.

dog-ear

A "dog-ear" is a folded-down corner of a book page. Unhyphenated, "dog ear" refers to the ears of a dog. A dog-ear usually serves as a bookmark. The practice is generally frowned upon by those that want to preserve books in their original condition. It is also sometimes used to keep sheets of paper together, in the absence of a stapler or paper clip.

The phrase dates back at least to the 17th century.

ear popping

Ear popping is a sensation that occurs when the pressure in your ears equalizes with the surrounding air pressure, often experienced during changes in altitude, such as flying or driving in mountains. It can also happen due to Eustachian tube dysfunction, which may be caused by allergies, colds, or sinus infections.

elephant ears

Elephant ears can refer to actual elephant ears, or a type of garden plant with large, heart-shaped leaves, or to a sweet fried pastry made from dough, often served at fairs.

have a wolf by the ears

The phrase "have a wolf by the ear" means to be in a difficult or dangerous situation where you cannot safely let go or hold on. It reflects a dilemma where both options could lead to trouble. A similar phrase is to "have a tiger by the tail."

have big ears

"Have big ears" means to be nosy or to listen in on private conversations. It often refers to someone who overhears things they shouldn't. When the

listeners are children, the phrase is "little pitchers have big ears."

The 'ears' refers to both the ears of the children who might be eavesdropping and also to the handles of the pitchers which, in medieval England, were called ears.

virgin ears

"Virgin ears" refers to ears that have not been exposed to inappropriate or offensive language, implying innocence or purity. It is often used humorously or ironically when someone is offended by vulgar speech.

whisper sweet nothings in one's ear

To "whisper sweet nothings in one's ear" means to murmur words of affection to someone in a flirtatious manner. The words may or may not be genuine.

wet behind the ears

"Wet behind the ears" means inexperienced, naive, or immature. The phrase originates from the idea that newborn animals are not fully dry behind their ears after birth, symbolizing their naivety.

This phrase was in circulation in the US in the early 20th century. It's the converse of the phrase 'dry back of the ears,' also known in the US from around the same date.

corn ears

Corn ears and human ears don't seem at all similar and the "ear" of corn that we eat in summer and the "ear" that we hear with are, indeed, unrelated. These are two separate and distinct words, both in existence since Anglo-Saxon days and have different prehistoric roots.

In Old, Middle, and Modern English, the word "ear" has been used to mean a spike or head of grain, which contains its flowers or seeds. This agricultural "ear" is descended from an ancient Indo-European root that's been reconstructed as *ak* (sharp). It became the Proto-Germanic *akhuz*, which eventually gave us the Old English word "ear" around the year 800.

The word for the organ of hearing is another story. It is descended from an Indo-European root reconstructed as *ous* or *aus* (ear). This root became the Proto-Germanic *auzon*, which made its way into Old English as "eare" around the year 1000.

Before 700, a "corn" in Old English was a small hard particle or seed, like an

apple seed. By the 800s it meant "the fruit of the cereals," so "corn" was simply grain in general: wheat, rye, barley, oats, and so on (hence the terms barley-corn and pepper-corn).

Not until the 1600s, in America, did "corn" refer to the maize or Indian corn grown there. The word as used in Britain still means grain in general. So, to an American, "ear of corn" means corn-on-the-cob, but to a farmer in Yorkshire, it might mean the head of an oat stalk.

According to one source, kernels on a corn cob are arranged in a spiral pattern, resembling the shape of an ear. My mirror tells me that my ear does not look like a corn cob, but perhaps I'm lacking in imagination.

Another source says that the shape resembles the ear of a donkey, the domesticated animal that was traditionally used to plow cornfields. I have my doubts about both those statements, though I do think a corn cob resembles a donkey's ear much more than it does my own.

Another story altogether is the horny growth you get on a sore toe called a "corn." The word for the sore on your toe entered English in the 15th century from the Old French "corn," which was inherited from the Latin *cornus* (horn).

Before the 15th century, Englishmen referred to such a sore as an "agnail," a now obscure word literally meaning a tight, painful nail. The "nail" in "agnail" became associated with toenails and fingernails, and the term "hangnail" eventually came about.

Chapter 19 — Bite Your Tongue

(mouth, lip, gums, teeth, tongue)

mouth

The mouth is the opening in the face of an animal through which food and air enter the body. It also plays a role in vocalization and speech and has several meanings.

"Mouth" as a noun:
—the opening through which an animal takes in food
—the visible part of the lips on the face
—the source of vocal utterance
—loud, empty, or boastful talk (known for his mouth)
—an opening leading into any cavity or hollow place
—the outfall at the lower end of a river or stream
—the opening between the jaws of a vise or the like
—the lateral hole of an organ pipe
—the lateral blowhole of a flute
—the opening of a container, such as a jar

"Mouth" as a verb:
—to form a sound silently or indistinctly in one's mouth
—to press, rub, or chew at with the mouth or lips

Idioms in brief:
—a bad taste in the mouth: an unpleasant memory
—another mouth to feed: another dependant
—by word of mouth: orally rather than by writing
—garbage (potty) mouth: someone who uses obscene language
—keep one's mouth shut: to keep a secret
—loudmouth: one given to loud, irritating, or indiscreet talk
—mealy-mouthed: not brave enough to be direct and honest
—mouth off: sass, express opinions in a forceful manner
—mouthpiece: a spokesperson
—open your big mouth: gossip or spread secrets
—take the bread out of someone's mouth: deprive someone

wet your whistle

"Whistle" is an old slang word for mouth or throat and it is a well-known fact

you can't whistle when your mouth is too dry. The expression "wet your whistle" is mostly used in informal contexts to mean "to have a drink" or "to satisfy one's thirst." The drink in question is usually alcohol. One could also say "to wet one's beak."

The term "wet one's whistle" is found in the Reeve's story in the *Canterbury Tales*, written by Chaucer. However, it is safe to assume that the term is older than this.

all mouth and no trousers

A man who indulges in empty, boastful, or arrogant talk, but who can't deliver on his claims, is said to be "all mouth and no trousers." The meaning is similar to the American phrase "all hat and no cattle."

The origin of "all mouth and no trousers" lies with the similar, earlier, but less often used expression "all mouth and trousers." To be "all mouth and trousers" is an English expression meaning to be loud, boastful and forward in a sexually-charged way.

"All mouth and no trousers," on the other hand, means "showiness but no delivery." That's similar to "all bark and no bite."

The first use of the latter phrase in print seems to be an article in the English newspaper *The Daily Mirror*, July 1974. It was written by Keith Waterhouse, giving his opinion of the Cypriot political leader Nicos Sampson:

"But the consensus view of the older hands was that, politically, he was all mouth and no trousers. It was a view I quickly came to share myself."

bad-mouth

To "bad-mouth" someone is to say bad things about that person or criticize him severely to other people.

The word comes from the 19th century phrase "bad mouth," meaning a curse or spell, which comes indirectly from West Indian and African languages.

born with a silver spoon in one's mouth

If you were "born with a silver spoon in your mouth," you were born into a wealthy and privileged family. You can also use "silver-spoon" before a noun to describe a person like this or their lifestyle. "Hers was no silver-spoon upbringing."

The earliest record in print is from the US Congress in 1801: "It was a

common proverb that few lawyers were born with silver spoons in their mouths."

Medieval spoons were usually made of wood. Spoon was also the name of a chip or splinter of wood and it is likely that is how the table utensils derived their name.

It has been a tradition in many countries for wealthy godparents to give a silver spoon to their godchildren at christening ceremonies. That may be the source of the phrase, or it may simply be derived from the fact that wealthy people ate from silver while others didn't.

In the keynote speech to the US Democratic National Convention in 1988, the Texas State Treasurer Ann Richards modified the proverb at the expense of the well-born and wealthy George Bush: "Poor George, he can't help it — he was born with a silver foot in his mouth."

down in the mouth

To be "down in the mouth" means to be sad or depressed, sometimes sulky.

The term refers to a mournful facial expression, with the corners of the mouth drawn down. Known by the mid-seventeenth century, it appears in print in Bishop Joseph Hall's *Cases of Conscience* (1649): "The Roman Orator was down in the mouth, finding himself thus cheated by the moneychanger." Occasionally it appeared as "down at the mouth," but that is a usage that is now obsolete.

run off at the mouth

To "run off at the mouth" is to talk too much, too loudly, or without discretion, especially about sensitive topics or information. Such talk usually comes from someone who is annoying, overbearing, and a braggart.

The image conveyed is that of a river of words flowing ceaselessly from someone's mouth, a case of logorrhea (verbal diarrhea). It's an American slang term dating from about 1900.

melts in the mouth

If food "melts in your mouth," it tastes very good. "This cake is wonderful—it just melts in one's mouth."

This expression, first recorded in 1693, at first alluded to the tenderness of food that did not require chewing, but it had acquired its present meaning by

about 1850.

mouth to mouth

"Mouth to mouth" is a well-known expression that describes the act of forcing air in and out of the lungs of a person who has stopped breathing by squeezing their nostrils shut, blowing into their mouth, and pressing their chest.

In such artificial respiration, the rescuer's mouth is placed tightly over the victim's mouth in order to force air into the victim's lungs.

mouth-watering

"Mouth-watering" food has a very good appearance or smell that makes you want to eat it.

This phrase likely comes from the fact that when humans see or smell food, their mouths produce more saliva than usual. The "water" mentioned in the phrase is not actually water, but saliva that the mouth produces. It is, however, mostly made up of water.

out of the mouths of babes and sucklings

This well-known idiom originates from the Bible. The phrase is often used to highlight how profound, wise, or surprising statements can unexpectedly come from children or those with little experience.

It conveys the notion that wisdom isn't exclusive to adults or the learned and usually carries a tone of surprise and admiration.

put words in somebody's mouth

To "put words in somebody's mouth" is to say that someone means one thing when the person really meant something else. If someone puts words into your mouth, they claim that you said something that you did not actually say.

take the words out of someone's mouth

To "take the words out of someone's mouth" is to say something just before someone else was going to say the same thing, or to say something that someone who agrees with you might have said. "When you mentioned her dislike of fish you took the words right out of my mouth."

This idiom was first recorded in 1574. Richard Grafton used it in *A Chronicle at Large* (1568; published 1809).

put your money where your mouth is

To "put your money where your mouth is" means to show by your actions that you really believe and support what you've said in words.

The phrase is often used about causes that need money. For example, "If the minister is so keen on the school, he should put his money where his mouth is and give us more resources."

turn to ashes in your mouth

This idiom describes how devastating it is when something that has been a source of joy or hope becomes a bitter disappointment.

This phrase alludes to the legendary Dead Sea fruit, which looked appetizing but turned to smoke and ashes when someone tried to eat it. The fruits are described in *Travels*, attributed to the 14th-century writer John de Mandeville.

wash your mouth out with soap

This is an old-fashioned punishment for using rude, vulgar, or obscene language. The words are usually spoken merely as a threat.

But the punishment has certainly been used and was especially common in the US and UK from the late 19th century until the mid-20th century.

Washing out the mouth with soap functions both as a symbolic "cleansing" following the infraction and as a deterrent, due to the foul aftertaste. It is commonly used as child discipline or school discipline.

This punishment still has advocates today.

Freedom of speech, anyone?

watch one's mouth

To "watch one's mouth" means to be very mindful or cautious about what one says, to control one's words in order to avoid offensive language.

The idiom has two primary meanings, depending on the context.

—Be careful about what you say, primarily if you use rude, offensive, or inappropriate language. It can be used as a warning or a command to someone speaking in a way that might offend, hurt, or anger someone else.

—Stop talking or be quiet, especially if you are saying something that is not true, respectful, or relevant. This meaning can express anger or annoyance at someone talking too much, lying, gossiping, complaining, or interrupting.

The exact origin of the phrase is unclear, but it has been widely used in English for many years. The word "watch" originates from the Old English *wæccan*, which means "to keep watch" or "to be awake."

speak out of both sides of your mouth

To "speak out of both sides of your mouth" means to try to maintain contradictory positions or beliefs in an attempt to please the most people. It suggests deceit, hypocrisy or a lack of dependability.

from the horse's mouth

If you get information "from the horse's mouth," you're getting it from the original or most reliable source.

The most trusted sources in horse racing authorities are considered to be those in closest touch with the horse, that is, stable lads, trainers, and so on. The phrase suggests that one step even better than that inner circle is the horse itself.

This expression may refer to the fact that you can tell a horse's age by looking at its teeth. Alternatively, it may simply refer to a racing tip which is so reliable that it's as if the horse itself has told you how well it is going to perform.

lips

Idioms in brief:

—bite your lip: refuse to react

—curl your lip: sneer at something

—don't give me any lip: don't be cheeky

—hang on someone's lips: be completely attentive

—lip off: to speak rudely or indiscreetly

—lip-lock: long, passionate kiss

—on everyone's lips: widely talked about

—read my lips: listen to what I say

—shoot from the lip: speak without forethought

—slip of the lip: unintentional mistake

button your lip

To button your lip is to remain silent, especially in order to keep a secret or to avoid saying something inappropriate.

A twentieth-century Americanism, this expression had been current long enough by 1940 for Raymond Chandler to make a play on it in *Farewell, My Lovely*: "Somebody ought to sew buttons on his face."

A more modern version is "zip your lip," which came into use when zippers started to replace buttons.

Should we now say "Velcro your lip!"?

keep a stiff upper lip

To keep a stiff upper lip means to remain stoic during difficult situations and appear to be resolute and stoical without showing your true feelings.

This term comes from America in the early 1800s and presumably refers to a trembling lip, which betrays that one is about to burst into tears. The expression actually does not make much sense, since it is usually the lower lip that trembles before weeping, but certainly any tremor of the upper lip would be particularly obvious in a man wearing a mustache, in the ubiquitous fashion of the 1830s. "What's the use of boohooin'? . . . keep a stiff upper lip," appeared in John Neal's *The Down-Easters* (1833), and the expression soon crossed the Atlantic to Britain.

The phrase is similar to 'bite the bullet,' 'keep your chin up,' and (to the amusement of many Americans) 'keep you pecker up.' It has become symbolic of the British, and particularly of the products of the English public school system during the age of the British Empire. In those schools the 'play up and play the game' ethos was inculcated into the boys who went on to rule the Empire. That 'do your duty and show no emotion' attitude was expressed in Alfred, Lord Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*:

> Theirs not to make reply,
> Theirs not to reason why,
> Theirs but to do and die:
> Into the valley of Death
> Rode the six hundred.

In more recent years the stiff upper lip has gone out of favor in the UK and British heroes have been able to show more emotion. Footballers now cry when they lose and soldiers cry at comrades' funerals, both of which would have been unthinkable before WWII.

loose lips sink ships

"Loose lips sink ships" is an American idiom meaning "beware of unguarded talk." The phrase originated on propaganda posters during World War II. This phrase was coined as a slogan as part of the attempt by the US Office of War Information to limit the possibility of people inadvertently giving useful information to enemy spies. People still use it, usually as an admonition to avoid careless talk in general.

The British equivalent was "Careless Talk Costs Lives," and variations on the phrase "Keep mum." In neutral Sweden, the State Information Board promoted the wordplay "En svensk tiger" meaning "A Swedish tiger" or "A Swede keeps silent." The Swedish word "tiger" means both "tiger" and "keeps silent." Germany used "Schäm Dich, Schwätzer!" meaning: "Shame on you, blabbermouth!"

However, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (in charge of dealing with enemy spies) had rounded up the key agents in June 1941, so that the nation "entered the war with confidence that there was no major German espionage network hidden in U.S. society." Thus, historian D'Ann Campbell argues that the purpose of the wartime posters, propaganda, and censorship of soldiers' letters was not to foil spies but "to clamp as tight a lid as possible on rumors that might lead to discouragement, frustration, strikes, or anything that would cut back military production."

pay lip service

The idiom "pay lip service" is like giving a fake hug or nodding in agreement when you don't actually mean it.

The phrase has been used since at least 1827, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. It is believed to have originated from the practice of touching one's lips as a sign of respect or obedience, but without actually doing what was being asked. Over time, the phrase evolved into its current meaning of appearing to give loyalty, respect, support, etc., but not actually doing so.

there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip

This phrase means that in any situation, however well planned, something can

always go wrong. Nothing is certain until it is completed. "Twixt" is a shortening of "betwixt," an archaic form of "between."

This old proverb is thought by many to come from the ancient Greek legend of Antaeus, helmsman of the ship Argo. A slave told him he would never live to taste the wine from his own vineyard. As some wine from his grapes was set before him, he sent for the slave to show him his mistake, but the slave allegedly said, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." Just then a messenger arrived, telling him the Calydonian boar was destroying his vineyard. Antaeus jumped up, set down his wine, and went out to kill the boar, but was himself killed by the ferocious animal.

In modern lingo, this thought might be expressed as, "don't count your chickens before they hatch."

tight-lipped

To be "tight-lipped" is to be unwilling to divulge information or reluctant to speak. It can also mean having the lips pressed together to avoid showing anger, or disgust.

This phrase originated in Europe in the late 1500s from the financial world. Then, when someone was "tight" with money, they were unwilling to spend. Soon, this phrase was used to refer to people who showed unwillingness to speak.

my lips are sealed

"My lips are sealed" means I will keep a secret. Although the idea of keeping one's mouth tightly shut is much older and sealing up someone else's lips dates from the late 1700s, this particular expression became current only in the early twentieth century. It was much repeated by Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin when asked about the rumored abdication of King Edward VIII, who wished to (and eventually did) marry a divorced American, Wallis Simpson.

smack one's lips

To "smack one's lips" means, literally, to lick one's lips in anticipation of eating something delicious. By extension, it means to eagerly anticipate something with great pleasure.

gumshoe

When you wear gumshoes, you're pulling on waterproof galoshes over your regular footwear. If you are a gumshoe, on the other hand, you're a private detective, investigating a case.

The "detective" meaning of this word comes from the "galoshes" definition. In fact, during the late 19th century, gumshoes or gums were any type of rubber-soled shoes. Around the turn of the 20th century, to gumshoe meant "to sneak around," and by 1906, gumshoe became a common nickname for plainclothes detectives (or private eyes), famous for moving stealthily in their quiet, rubber-soled shoes.

up a gum tree

To be "up a gum tree" means you're in great difficulties. Being up any kind of tree, of course, means the same. A similar phrase is "to be up the creek without a paddle."

The phrase originated in America as 'like a possum up a gum tree.' The allusion is to possums escaping up trees when being chased by hounds. Depending on one's point of view, the possum could be in difficulty because it can't escape, or relaxing contentedly because the hounds can't catch it.

Gum tree is the common name for the Eucalyptus in Australia and the Black Gum or Tupelo in North America.

The use of 'gum' as an intensifier would add to the allusion of being in trouble (a sticky situation).

The phrase was well-enough known by 1840 for it to have been adapted as the name of a dance. This is referred to by the Canadian author Thomas Haliburton, in his *The Clockmaker, 3rd Series*, 1840: "Many's the time I have danced 'Possum up a gum tree' at a quiltin' frolic or huskin' party."

teeth

Idioms in brief:

—a law with no teeth: ineffective or difficult to enforce

—bare your teeth: show aggression or hostility

—cut one's teeth: gain early experience

—fly in the teeth of: go against

—get your teeth into: become fully involved

—gnash one's teeth: lash out in anger

—hell's teeth!: an exclamation of surprise or anger

—kick in the teeth: a shocking disappointment

—my back teeth are floating: I need to pee NOW

with a fine-tooth comb

If you go through something "with a fine-tooth comb," you examine it in great detail and with great care . A literal fine-tooth comb is one with narrow teeth that are close together and very useful for combing fleas out of a cat's fur.

nature red in tooth and claw

The phrase "red in tooth and claw" means characterized by savage violence or merciless competition. It originated as a quotation from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850.

"Red in tooth and claw" is a reference to the sometimes violent natural world, in which predatory animals unsentimentally cover their teeth and claws with the blood of their prey as they kill and devour them.

Tennyson's wide-ranging poem became part of the debate over the major scientific and theological concern of Victorian thinkers — Charles Darwin's theories on natural selection, as expressed in *The Origin of Species*, 1859. In the 20th century, the enthusiastic Darwinist Richard Dawkins used "red in tooth and claw" in *The Selfish Gene*, to summarize the behavior of all living things which arises out of the survival of the fittest doctrine.

sweet tooth

Having a "sweet tooth" means having a love or craving for sweet food.

The phrase has been used in English since the late fourteenth century, and it comes from "toothsome," an even older word meaning delicious or tasty. "Thou hast … a sweet tooth in thy head, a liquorish appetite to delicate meats and intoxicating wines," wrote Thomas Adams in a sermon of 1629.

lie through one's teeth

To lie through one's teeth means to prevaricate outrageously. Versions of this seemingly modern expression appeared as long ago as the 1300s. William Safire cites its use in *The Romance of Sir Guy of Warwick* (1300s).

Of more recent provenance is to lie like a trooper, dating from the late 1800s; the British version is to swear like a trooper. Why a trooper should have been singled out is a matter of conjecture. Presumably it alludes to the legendary lack of truthfulness in the military, especially the lower ranks, who lie to escape punishment. Originally "like a trooper" meant vigorously, or with great enthusiasm, which clearly was carried over to lying.

Another version of the phrase is "lie in one's teeth," as in, "To accuse a person of lying in his teeth is the strongest of accusations, implying that the person is such a double-dyed liar as to be unfamiliar with truth."

fight tooth and nail

To "fight tooth and nail" means to physically fight with great ferocity. By extension, it means to resist, oppose, or stand up against someone/something with great intensity and tenacity. "Tooth and nail" clearly alludes to the fights that are undertaken by wild animals when hunting prey. The analogy to biting and scratching was drawn by the sixteenth century and has been used ever since for fierce contention. Dickens used it in *David Copperfield* (1850).

armed to the teeth

If you're "armed to the teeth," you are perhaps overly well-equipped or prepared, as in "With her elaborate gown and makeup, she was armed to the teeth for her first New York appearance." You could also describe her as "dressed to the teeth."

The expression "to the teeth" meant "well-equipped" in the 14th century, when knights often wore head-to-foot armor. The idiom, however, only gained currency in the mid-1800s, at first still applied to weapons or other military equipment. Today it is used more figuratively.

The idiom can be linked to the Golden Age of Piracy in the 17th century, particularly in Port Royal, Jamaica. Pirates were known to carry an extensive array of weapons, including knives and cutlasses, sometimes even clenching a small knife between their teeth as they prepared for battle. Literature and film have popularized this portrayal of pirates armed to the teeth, contributing to the romanticized image of swashbuckling buccaneers.

bone in the teeth

A "bone in the teeth" refers to a prominent bow wave created by a boat or ship moving at high speed, resembling a happy dog with a bone. It is a nautical expression that captures the excitement of sailing fast.

cast in one's teeth

To "cast something in someone's teeth" means to accuse or reproach someone for something, often by reminding them of a past mistake or statement. It can also refer to throwing a taunt or challenge at someone.

I've never heard this idiom. It strikes me as identical to "throw back in one's face," since the action is identical.

get the bit between one's teeth

To "get the bit between one's teeth" means to start doing something in a very enthusiastic and determined way, often after initially hesitating. It implies taking control of a situation with focus and commitment.

A bit is a mouthpiece that is used to control a horse's movements. It is normally fitted so that pressure on the reins presses the bit against the soft parts of the horse's mouth, causing it to turn its head and therefore its direction. This expression alludes to a horse biting on the bit and taking control away from the rider.

give one's eyeteeth

To "give one's eyeteeth" for something means to be willing to make a significant sacrifice or pay a high price to obtain it. This idiom reflects the idea that eyeteeth, being useful for both biting and chewing, are valuable and essential.

These pointed long teeth, also called canines because they look a bit like those in dogs, are called eyeteeth because the pair in the upper jaw lie directly below the eyes.

Many idioms have been created to describe the strength of a person's desire for a particular thing or outcome, offering right arms, their last penny, their firstborn, their shirts, the last drop of their heart's blood. Eye teeth is just another offering.

grit one's teeth

To "grit one's teeth" means to clench one's teeth together tightly because of

pain or anger or frustration. Figuratively, it means to face up to a difficult or disagreeable situation, and deal with it.

The idiom comes from the wisdom of ancient times, particularly the Greeks and Romans. While the precise first appearance isn't documented, the phrase can be traced back at least to ancient Greek playwright Menander, around 300 BCE. His work, *The Girl from Samos*, contained the phrase, "Set your teeth and endure."

set one's teeth on edge

The idiom "set one's teeth on edge" means, literally, the intense shuddering feeling that comes from biting on a piece of tinfoil or into raw rhubarb, or hearing a fingernail scratch on a chalkboard. Figuratively, it means to irritate or annoy intensely.

It appears in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, Part 1 (1596) in a speech of Hotspur's:

> I had rather hear a brazen canstick turn'd,
> Or a dry wheel grate on the axle-tree;
> And that would set my teeth nothing on edge,
> Nothing so much as mincing poetry:

sow dragon's teeth

"Sow dragon's teeth" means to take an action that leads to conflict or trouble. This phrase is often used to describe actions that intentionally or unintentionally create disputes or negative consequences.

The classical legends of Cadmus and Jason have given rise to the phrase "to sow dragon's teeth." This is used as a metaphor to refer to doing something that has the effect of fomenting disputes. In Swedish, the myth is the source of the idiom *draksådd* (dragon-seed) with the meaning of spreading corrupting ideas, or in the broader sense, actions with dire consequences.

Cadmus, the bringer of literacy and civilization, killed the sacred dragon that guarded the spring of Ares. Athena gave Cadmus half of the dragon's teeth, advising him to sow them. When he did, fierce armed men sprang up from the furrows. Cadmus threw a stone among them, because he feared them, and they, thinking that the stone had been thrown by one of the others, fought each other until only five of them remained. These five helped Cadmus to found the city of Thebes, but Cadmus was forced to be a slave to Ares for eight years to atone for killing the dragon.

Similarly, Jason was challenged to sow dragon's teeth in order to obtain the Golden Fleece. Medea advised Jason to throw a stone between the warriors

that sprang from the earth. The warriors started fighting and killing each other, leaving no survivor but Jason.

the gods send nuts to those who have no teeth

The phrase "the gods send nuts to those who have no teeth" suggests that opportunities or pleasures often come too late for some people. It reflects the idea that life can be unfair, providing things we cannot use when we need them most.

tongue

Idioms in brief:

—double-tongued: deceitful or insincere, two-faced

—get your tongue around: able to pronounce

—give tongue to: articulate orally

—have a loose tongue: talk too much

—have a worm in one's tongue: ornery, prone to lashing out

—honey-tongued devil: seductive, persuasive person

—keep a civil tongue in your head: don't be rude

—mother tongue: one's native language

—one's tongue is hanging out: eager anticipation

—roll off the tongue: very easy or enjoyable to say

—salty tongue: use coarse, rude language

—serpent's tongue: speak maliciously

—sharp tongue: malicious or critical speech

—silver-tongued: eloquent, persuasive

—tongue loosener: alcohol

—tongue-lashing: a severe scolding

—tongue-tied: too shy to speak

—trip over one's tongue: have difficulty speaking

—wagging tongues: gossiping

on the tip of one's tongue

If something such as a word, answer, or name is "on the tip of your tongue," you know that you know it and can almost remember it, but not quite.

A similar term that is older had quite a different meaning is "at one's tongue's end" and meant that one could not keep from saying something but blurted it out. Thus, "Having always at her tongue's end that excellent proverb" (Henry Fielding, *Amelia*, 1751) meant she could not stop repeating it. This version is obsolete, but "on the tip of the tongue" has been a cliché since about 1850.

slip of the tongue

A "slip of the tongue" is something you say by accident when you intended to say something else or you might mispronounce a word. Another version of the idiom is "slip of the lip." The phrase "a slip of the pen" means the same thing, but now we'd have to say "a slip of the finger" (on the keyboard).

bite your tongue

It might seem as though "bite your tongue" means you are punishing it for saying the wrong thing, that that's not so. The phrase means "refrain from speaking out," as in "A new grandmother must learn to bite her tongue so as not to give unwanted advice."

The term alludes to holding the tongue between the teeth in an effort not to say something one might regret. Shakespeare used it in *Henry VI*: "So York must sit and fret and bite his tongue."

"Watch one's tongue" has a similar meaning.

speaking in tongues

Speaking in tongues, also known as glossolalia, is an activity or practice in which people utter words or speech-like sounds that lack any readily comprehensible meaning. The exact phrase has been used at least since the translation of the New Testament into Middle English in the *Wycliffe Bible* in the 14th century.

In some cases, as part of religious practice, some believe it to be a divine language unknown to the speaker. Glossolalia is practiced in Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, as well as in other religions.

It was a commonplace idea within the Ancient world that divine beings spoke languages different from human languages, and historians of religion have identified references to esoteric speech in Greco-Roman literature that resemble glossolalia.

In his writings on early Christianity, the Greek philosopher Celsus includes an account of Christian glossolalia. Celsus describes prophecies made by several Christians in Palestine and Phoenicia of which he writes, "Having brandished these threats they then go on to add incomprehensible, incoherent, and utterly obscure utterances, the meaning of which no intelligent person could discover: for they are meaningless and nonsensical, and give a chance for any fool or sorcerer to take the words in whatever sense he likes."

tongue twister

A tongue twister is a word or a phrase that is difficult to articulate properly. Tongue twisters can be used as a type of spoken (or sung) word game or as exercises to improve pronunciation and fluency. Some tongue twisters produce results that are humorous (or humorously vulgar) when they are mispronounced, while others simply rely on the confusion and mistakes of the speaker for their amusement value.

As well as for exercises in speaking, tongue twisters have also been recommended for curing hiccups and for curing lisps and other speech defects. They are also used for testing the fit of dentures and for screening applicants for broadcasting positions.

Early examples can be traced back to languages like Sanskrit and Chinese, where complex combinations of sounds were used as linguistic challenges for scholars.

During the medieval period, tongue twisters thrived. Monks and scholars composed intricate verbal exercises as a form of mental gymnastics. These challenges not only tested one's mastery of language but also provided amusement in the midst of scholarly pursuits. Tongue twisters are often passed on for generations, becoming a rich part of folklore.

The following well-known tongue twister was originally published in 1850 as a diction exercise. It was turned into a popular song in 1908, with words by British songwriter Terry Sullivan and music by Harry Gifford.

> She sells sea-shells by the sea-shore.
> The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure.
> For if she sells sea-shells by the sea-shore
> Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.

Many tongue twisters use a combination of alliteration and rhyme. An example of this is the song "Betty Botter," first published in 1899:

> Betty Botter bought a bit of butter. "But," she said, "this butter's bitter!
> If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter!"

So she bought a bit of butter better than her bitter butter,
And she put it in her batter, and her batter was not bitter.
So 'twas better Betty Botter bought a bit of better butter.

In 1968, Jack Webb guested on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* and took part in a parody of *Dragnet*. The premise was Webb (as Sgt. Joe Friday) grilling Carson about "kleptomaniac Claude Cooper from Cleveland, who copped clean copper clappers kept in a closet." The sketch was regularly shown on anniversary specials.

I've seen it and it was hilarious.

Tongue twisters exist in many languages. For example in Spanish: *trabalenguas*, literally 'tongue jammer,' and in German: *Zungenbrecher*, literally 'tongue breaker.' I couldn't agree more.

The sign language equivalent of a tongue twister is called a finger-fumbler. Say that one three times fast! Funger-fibler!

Chapter 20 — Bow the Knee

(leg, limb, knee, calf)

Leg

Idioms in brief:

—a lie has no legs: it can't be proved

—crooked as a dog's hind leg: dishonest

—get a leg over: of a man, to have sex

—get up on your hind legs: become assertive or angry

—have a hollow leg: have an insatiable appetite

—have legs: likely to be successful

—leg it: walk or run away

—on your last legs: on the verge of failure or death

not have a leg to stand on

If you "don't have a leg to stand on," that means you cannot prove something. Your idea has no support and no chance of success. This metaphor, which dates from the sixteenth century, applies the lack of physical support to an argument or hypothesis. The Elizabethan satirist Thomas Nashe used it in *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).

get one's sea legs

To "get one’s sea leg" means to become accustomed to the pitch and roll of a marine vessel or, by extension, to become used to a new situation. This expression was first recorded in 1712 and then referred to, as it still does, the ability to walk steadily on board ship, especially in rough seas. By the late 1800s, it was being transferred to other challenging situations.

give somebody a leg up

This phrase means to help someone accomplish something. It alludes to helping someone up onto a horse. You cup your hands, creating a foothold for one of their feet while they propel their other leg up into the stirrup. From there, they can swing into the saddle.

show a leg

"Show a leg!" That means: rouse yourself from sleep and get out of bed. The phrase originated in the British Royal Navy around the turn of the 19th century.

Sailors were roused from their hammocks by the call "Show a leg!" The appearance of a leg indicated that the mariner was awake and ready to rise.

An alternative version of the derivation of "show a leg" comes from the fact that women were allowed on board Royal Navy ships in the 19th century. They were allowed to stay asleep after the sailors had been roused. The order of show a leg was supposed to have been given so that a shapely or stockinged woman's leg could be distinguished from that of the hairy-legged sailor. It's a cute story, but is it true?

The use of show a leg as a wake-up call is well documented, though. John Masefield (Poet Laureate from 1930 to 1967) was a trainee mariner on HMS Conway until 1891. He reported the full version of the morning call as:

> Heave out, heave out, heave out, heave out! Away!
> Come all you sleepers, Hey!
> Show a leg and put a stocking on it.

with one's tail between one's legs

This phrase means that you're displaying embarrassment or shame, especially after losing or having to admit that you were wrong. It no doubt arose because of the way a dog literally puts its tail between its legs after being disciplined and humiliated.

dogleg

A dogleg refers to something that has a sharp bend or turn, resembling the shape of a dog's hind leg. In golf, it specifically describes a hole with an angled fairway that requires strategic play to navigate around the bend. It can refer to a sharp turn in a road built in hilly terrain.

first leg

"First leg" refers to the first stage or part of something, such as a journey or the first of two matches in a sports competition, particularly in soccer, where teams compete in a two-legged tie. In travel, it denotes the first segment of a multi-part trip.

hog leg

A "hog leg" refers to a large single-action revolver, commonly associated with cowboys in the Wild West. It can also describe a large marijuana joint or cigarette.

legwork

"Legwork" refers to the work that happens when a project is in an early stage. You could be asking people for interviews, collecting information, conducting surveys — the possibilities are endless. It's called legwork because it contrasts with sitting down to write up what you found out. These days, though, a lot of legwork also happens from behind a desk. If you're gathering information or other material for a project, you can still call it legwork, even if you didn't travel or walk around to do it.

legman

A "legman" is someone who does "legwork." That would be a person, often a reporter or assistant, who is assigned to gather information or run errands, typically outside of an office setting. The term can also refer to someone who has a particular interest in legs, especially in a sexual context.

peg-leg

A peg-leg is a prosthesis, or artificial limb, fitted to the remaining stump of a human leg, especially a wooden one fitted at the knee. Its use dates to antiquity.

By the late 19th century, prosthetics vendors would offer peg-legs as cheaper alternatives to more intricate, lifelike artificial legs. Even as vendors touted advantages of more complicated prostheses over simple peg legs, according to a contemporary surgeon, many patients found a peg-leg more comfortable for walking. According to medical reports, some amputees were able to adjust to the use of a peg leg so well that they could walk 10, or even 30, miles in one day.

limb

"Limb" has several meanings:
—an arm or leg
—a large branch of a tree
—an animal's leg, wing, or flipper
—a projecting part, as of a building or mountain range
—an extension from the main body or group: the conservative limb of the party

—archaic: an impish child, "limb of Satan"

go out on a limb

To "go out on a limb" is to take a risk, to hazard a guess, to go just a bit further than is comfortable. It can mean putting oneself in an isolated position in one's support of someone or something.

The limb being talked about here is the branch of a tree and the phrase is an allusion to climbing trees and leaving the support of the trunk to go out on a single branch, thus becoming isolated, exposed, and perhaps stranded. This action brings a fear that the branch (limb) may break under us.

Similar phrases are "painted into a corner" and "twist in the wind."

risk life and limb

To "risk life and limb" means to risk one's neck, to take dangerous chances.

"Life and limb" simply means one's bodily well-being, including one's life. The phrase is usually used when describing something that might cause severe injury or death, especially in the phrase "risk life and limb." We tend to refer to the military as those people who risk life and limb every day to keep our country safe.

knee

Idioms in brief:

—bow the knee: show deference

—fall on one's knees: kneel down

—housemaid's knee: swelling of the bursa over the kneecap

—knee-deep navy: nickname for the US Coast Guard

—knee-deep: plentiful or overwhelming

—knee-slapper: an extremely funny joke

—knee-trembler: sexual intercourse while standing

—knee-walking drunk: very drunk.

—on bended knee: submissively and earnestly pleading

—put over one's knee: spank

—weak in the knees: feeling strong emotion

knee high to a grasshopper

A grasshopper is tiny, and to stand, metaphorically speaking, no higher than the insect's knee is to be very short or young or both.

The term, used most often to describe someone's extreme youth, originated in America about 1850, when it replaced the earlier nineteenth-century "knee-high to a mosquito," "bumble-bee," "splinter," and "duck."

The expression was often used to describe the speaker's experience: "I've driven tractors since I was knee high to a grasshopper."

knee-jerk reaction

This expression comes from the body's natural reflexes. If someone hits a knee in the right place, the leg will kick outwards. This happens quickly, because the nervous system does not send the signal all the way to the brain and back. Rather, it is an automatic reaction that moves from the knee to the spine and back again, allowing it to happen speedily.

People have been using this expression figuratively since the early 1900s. In that sense, a knee-jerk reaction is any spontaneous, reflexive, and unthinking reaction or response.

take a knee

Taking the knee is a symbolic gesture against racism whereby an individual kneels upon one knee in place of standing to attention for an anthem or other such occasion. It was originated by American football player Colin Kaepernick on September 1, 2016, in protest against the lack of attention given to the issues of racial inequality and police brutality in the US. Kaepernick's protest led to a wider series of national anthem protests. It has since been adopted by sports players in countries around the world, including association football in the UK, in solidarity with Kaepernick's protest against racism, and has been seen worldwide in non-sporting contexts.

cut one off at the knees

"Cut someone off at the knees" means to abruptly thwart or shut someone down, often limiting their ability to succeed or explain themselves. It's used to describe situations where someone's efforts or arguments are quickly dismissed or undermined.

have a knees-up

To "have a knees-up" means to have a party, especially one marked by spirited dancing. "Knees-up" comes from *Knees Up Mother Brown*, a song associated with the pubs of London's East End in the 20th century.

calf

"Calf" means:
—fleshy back part of the human leg between knee and ankle
—an immature young cow or bull
—the young of certain other mammals, such as elephants or whales
—a large floating chunk of ice split off from a glacier

golden calf

A "golden calf" is something, especially wealth, which is given inordinate or unworthy praise, worship, or reverence. The term arose in reference to a Bible story about an idol created and worshipped by the Israelites, which was considered blasphemous in God's eyes. I haven't heard anyone use it but here's a sample sentence: "She's always made her career something of a golden calf —that's why she hasn't had a romantic relationship in over a decade."

kill the fatted calf

To kill the fatted calf means to prepare for a joyful occasion or a warm welcome to someone after a long absence. The phrase comes from a biblical story recounting the return of the prodigal son. Nowadays, we would say "fattened" rather than "fatted."

Ankle

Idioms in brief:
—ankle biter: a young child
—by ankle express: by walking

Chapter 21 — Best Foot Forward

(foot, heel, toe)

foot

The foot is the terminal part of the leg in vertebrates, which bears weight and allows for locomotion. In humans, it consists of 26 bones and 33 joints, along with various muscles and ligaments. Because it's the bottom of the body, we also use it to describe the lowest or supporting part of many things, such as a hill, a ladder, a page, or the last part of a series. As well, it can mean:
—a unit of length, divided into 12 inches
—an attachment on a sewing machine that holds and guides the fabric
—a group of syllables constituting a metrical unit of a verse

As a verb, "to foot" means to move, as in walking or dancing. It can also mean to establish a base (the footing for a building) or to add (a column of figures) and set the sum at the bottom.

Foot becomes "footless" as an adjective and means, of course, having no feet. But it's usually used to mean incompetent or unsubstantial.

Idioms in brief:

—back on one's feet: in good shape after a time of problems

—be carried out feet first: you won't leave until you're dead

—be swept off your feet: fall madly in love

—best foot forward: favorable first impression

—crow's feet: wrinkles at the corner of the eyes

—feet of clay: underlying weakness or fault

—foot (leg) in the door: first step toward a goal

—get off on the right/wrong foot: to begin well/badly

—get one's feet wet: start a new activity or job

—have one foot in the grave: on the verge of death

—have one's feet on the ground: sensible and practical

—heavy foot: inclined to get speeding tickets

—kick with the wrong foot: to be of a different religion to that which is regarded as acceptable or to that of the person who is speaking

—my foot!: an expression of disbelief

—on foot: travel by walking or running

—on one's feet: standing up or fully recovered

—put a foot wrong: make a mistake

—put one's foot down: act firmly or speed up in a car

—put one's foot in it: to blunder

—put one's foot in one's mouth: say something stupid

—set foot on/in: to enter ("Don't set foot in this office again!")

—set on foot: to start something

—tread under foot: to oppress

—under foot: in the way

afoot

To be "afoot' means to be on foot, walking, or that something is in the process of being carried out.

Something that's afoot is already happening, underway, or being prepared. People frequently say that plans are afoot when they've started preparing for a party, an election campaign, a job hunt, or anything else that requires some planning.

"The game's afoot" is a phrase originally from Shakespeare's play *Henry V*, where it signifies the beginning of a challenge or battle. It was later popularized by Arthur Conan Doyle in his Sherlock Holmes stories.

don't let the grass grow under your feet

This proverb is used to tell someone not to delay in seizing an opportunity. Presumably, if grass is growing under your feet, you're wasting time. A similar saying is "A rolling stone gathers no moss."

The first known use of this proverb in print is in Nicolas Udall's comic play *Ralph Roister Doister* (1566).

sit at someone's feet

To sit at someone's feet means to be in a position of devotion or worship to someone, to pay homage or reverential attention to that person. It can also mean to be a pupil.

hotfoot

"Hotfoot" means to go in haste, as in "hotfoot it out of town."

The "hot foot" is a prank where the prankster sets the victim's shoe laces or shoe on fire with a match or lighter. Other versions of the prank involve using

a cigarette on the victim's heel, placing a lit match between two bare toes on the victim, or sticking a book of matches to the victim's shoe with gum and lighting the matches.

Some people have peculiar ideas of what constitutes humor.

vote with your feet

To "vote with your feet" is to express your opinion by leaving a situation, organization, or activity, particularly when you're dissatisfied. For example, if customers stop going to a restaurant due to poor service, they are "voting with their feet."

The concept of a vote with the feet originated in ancient Rome. Robert Fowler Leighton's *A History of Rome*, published in 1878: "The senators who had not held a *curule* office were styled senators *pedarii* because they assented to the opinions of the consulates, praetorii, etc., and when the division was taken, voted with their feet."

wrong-footed

To be "wrong-footed" means to be caught off guard or put in a difficult situation by an unexpected action or move. It is often used in sports, particularly tennis, where it refers to deceiving an opponent by hitting the ball in an unexpected direction. "He won quite a few points by wrong-footing his opponent."

foot-and-mouth disease

Foot-and-mouth (or hoof-and-mouth) disease is a highly contagious and sometimes fatal viral infection that primarily affects livestock, such as cattle and pigs. The virus causes a high fever lasting two to six days, followed by blisters inside the mouth and near the hoof that may rupture and cause lameness.

Like other RNA viruses, the FMD virus continually evolves and mutates, thus one of the difficulties in vaccinating against it is the huge variation between, and even within, serotypes. It is distinct, however, from hand, foot, and mouth disease, which affects humans, especially children.

heel

The "heel" is the back of a vertebrate foot below the ankle and behind the arch or the back part of any footwear. Because it's the "back part," it's also used to mean the crusty ends of a loaf of bread, the base of the human palm, and a dishonorable person.

As a verb, heel can mean:
—to furnish with a heel or heels
—to supply, especially with money
—to tilt to one side (a sailboat heeling in the wind)
—to follow at one's heels (The dog won't heel.)

Idioms in brief:

—back on one's heels (in a state of surprise or disadvantage)

—cool/kick one's heels (be kept waiting)

—dig your heels in (cling stubbornly to your position)

—down (out) at the heels (shabby, dirty, worn)

—keep to heel (to control)

—lay by the heels (take in a tight grip, imprison)

—on the heels of (directly following)

—take to one's heels (run away)

—under one's heel (under one's complete control)

hot on the heels

"Hot on the heels" means being in close pursuit of someone or something, or immediately after some event.

This phrase derives from hunting terminology. The 'on the heels' part of this expression refers to a hunter's closeness to his quarry. And, if he's not on the heels, he needs to hurry up.

The word 'hot' probably alludes to the warmth of an active living creature. Trails are said to have "gone cold" when hounds can no longer sense anything of the prey.

When excited and animated, all mammals become hotter and, when hounds are close to their quarry, they are said to be 'in hot pursuit.' The same allusion is used in guessing games when players are said to get warmer and warmer as they get nearer to success.

kick up one's heels

When you "kick up your heels," you're doing things you enjoy, casting off inhibitions and having a good time. Also, it can imply rebellion against authority or societal norms. It often means to participate in happy festivities, such as dancing. "They spent most of their Saturdays kicking up their heels at the various nightclubs around town."

The phrase may have had its roots in the behavior of horses. A horse will kick up its hind legs when feeling playful or energetic.

This term originally meant to be knocked down or killed. Thomas Dekker used it in this sense in his play, *The Honest Whore* (1604): "I would not for a duckat she had kickt up her heeles." The modern sense dates from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

well-heeled

"Well-heeled" is an American term which means to be prosperous or in fortunate circumstances. This definition is the modern version. The phrase has, in the past, also meant being equipped with a weapon, or having a heel or spur.

Good quality shoes have never been available to the poor and consequently have been seen as an indication of prosperity. We can assume that the heel referred to here is the heel of a shoe or boot, as in the converse of the phrase, 'down at the heels.'

To be 'equipped with a weapon' meaning is given in J. H. Beadle's *Undeveloped West*, 1873: "To travel long out West a man must be, in the local phrase, 'well heeled'."

The 'having a heel' definition is cited in the Iowa newspaper the *Dubuque Daily Herald*, in April 1866: "… they resembled dung hill chickens thrown into the pit with their natural spurs, to meet and contend with game birds well heeled. One stroke puts them to flight, squawking as they go; they cannot stand steel." Here, the heel is clearly an applied spur that the protagonists were equipped with during cock-fights.

round heels

This phrase is termed "offensive slang" and means an inclination or willingness for sexual promiscuity. The phrase alludes to the heels of a woman's shoes becoming rounded due to her frequently falling backward onto a bed. It can also mean a tendency for anyone to relent to pressure very easily and without protest.

The phrase and others like it, such as "tramp," were popular in men's dormitories and barracks until the sexual revolution changed attitudes. On the other hand, men were applauded for being a "lady's man," a "cocksman," a "Romeo," or a "Casanova," all of which demonstrate which gender controlled the language.

heel-and-toe

The phrase "heel-and-toe" describes a walking or jogging technique in which the heel of one foot touches the ground before the toe of the other foot leaves it. In motor racing, it means to use the heel and toe of the same foot to operate the brake and accelerator.

heel-to-toe walking

"Heel-to-toe walking" is a balance assessment technique where a person walks in a straight line, placing the heel of one foot directly in front of the toes of the other foot. This method is often used to evaluate balance and coordination.

go toe-to-toe

To "go toe-to-toe" with someone means engaging in a direct confrontation or competition. It can refer to both physical contests, like boxing, and also competitions such as debates or negotiations.

Toe to Toe is an Australian hardcore band from Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. It's also the title of a movie about two lacrosse teammates from opposite sides of the track.

timber-toe

A timber-toe is a wooden leg, or the person who has one.

toenailing

No, this is not another word for getting your toenails painted.

Toenailing (or skew-nailing) is a sound method of driving a nail at a roughly 30° angle to fasten two pieces of wood together. The term comes colloquially

from fastening wood at the bottom, or toe, of the board. A variation of toenailing is to use screws, casually known as "toe-screwing." Toenails are typically driven in opposing pairs when possible, or pairs of pairs when appropriate. The angled nailing makes later dismantling difficult or destructive.

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rub shoulders with
rub someone's nose in it
run around like a blue-arsed fly
run in one's blood
run off at the mouth
run one's eye over

salty tongue
save face
save one's neck
save one's own skin
sawbones
say something to one's face
scatterbrain
screw up one's face
search one's heart
see eye to eye
see the back of
serpent's tongue
set foot on/in; (to enter)
set on foot
set one's face against
set one's hair on fire
set one's heart on
set one's teeth on edge
set someone's heart on fire
set something on its ear
set your hand to

set your heart at rest
sharp eyes
sharp tongue
shift/move your arse
shoot from the lip
shoot off one's face
short-arm inspection
should have your head examined
shoulder
shoulder surfing
shoulder the blame
shoulder to shoulder
shove something down someone's throat
show a leg
show muscle
show one's face
show some skin
shrug one's shoulders
shut one's eyes and think of England
shut the door in someone's face
shut your face!
sick at heart
sick to the stomach
silver-tongued
sit at someone's feet
sit heavy on the stomach
sit on one's hands
skeleton at the feast
skeleton key
skeleton staff
skin an eel by the tail
skin and bones (bag of bones)
skin flick
skin game
sleep with one eye open
sleepyhead
slip of the lip
slip of the tongue
slip one's mind
smack in the eye
smack one's lips
small arms
smell blood
snap your fingers

someone's ass is grass
something hanging over your head
sow dragon's teeth
spark in one's eyes
speak from the heart
speak one's mind
speak out of both sides of your mouth
speaking in tongues
speedhead
spine
spine-tingling
spit blood
spit in one's eye
split a gut
sporting blood
spring to mind
square joint
stab someone in the back
stand something on its head
standing on the shoulders of giants
stare in the face
starry-eyed
stay one's hand
steal someone's heart
steel one's heart against
stick out like a sore thumb
stick your chin out
stick your neck out
sticks and stones may break my bones
sticks in one's throat
sticky fingers
stiff-necked
stir the blood
stomach
stomach in knot
stone-faced
stop ironing my head
straight from the shoulder
strike at the heart
strike one's eye
strong in the arm and thick in the head
strong-arm
stumblebum
sweat blood

sweet tooth
swill-belly

take a back seat
take a haircut
take a knee
take heart
take it on the nose
take the bread out of someone's mouth
take the law into one's own hands
take the spear in one's chest
take the words out of someone's mouth
take to heart
take to one's heels
take your courage in both hands
take your life in your hands
talk one's ear off
talk through the back of one's head
talk to the hand
talking head
taste blood
tear one's heart out
tear your hair out
the ace in one's hand
the back of one's hand
the brains
the brains of the outfit
the eye is bigger than the belly
the eye of the tiger
the face that launched a thousand ships
the finger
the fullness of your heart
the gods send nuts to those who have no teeth
the hand is quicker than the eye
the hand the rocks the cradle rules the world
the heart has its reasons
the law is an ass
the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing
the long arm of the law
the moving finger writes
the nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat
the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak
the three-finger salute
the two-finger salute

the way to a man's heart is through his stomach
there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip
thickheaded
think the sun shines out of one's ass
thorn in the flesh
throat
through the eyes of someone
throw dust in someone's eyes
throw in someone's face
throw one's hand in
throw someone a bone
thumb
thumb one's nose
thumbnail sketch
thumb war
tick something off on your fingers
tickle the mind
tight-lipped
timber-toe
time out of mind
tip one's hand
to head off
to mind
to one's heart's content
to one's mind
to stomach
to the bone
toenailing
toffee-nosed
Tom Thumb
tongue loosener
tongue twister
tongue-lashing
tongue-tied
too rich for one's blood
top hand
toss out on one's ear
touches the heart
tread under foot
trip over one's tongue
try your hand
turn a blind eye
turn one's face to the wall
turn one's head

turn one's mind to something
turn one's nose up at
turn one's stomach
turn the other cheek
turn to ashes in your mouth
turn your back on
twiddle one's thumbs
twist someone's arm
two heads are better than one
two-faced
two-finger typing

under foot
under one's heel
under one's nose
under someone's thumb
uneasy lies the head that wears the crown
up a gum tree
up in arms
up to the elbows
use your head

viper in one's bosom
virgin ears
vote with your feet

wagging tongues
wait on hand and foot
war chest
warm the cockles of your heart
warm-hearted
wash your mouth out with soap
watch one's mouth
watch your back
weak in the knees
wear a hair shirt
wear your heart on your sleeve
weigh heavily on one's heart
weigh on your mind
well-heeled
went over my head
wet behind the ears
wet the baby's head
wet your whistle
What am I? Chopped liver?

what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve
what's-his-face
whip hand
whisper sweet nothings in one's ear
white-knuckle ride
whole-hearted
win by a head
win by a neck
win by a nose
win one's heart
wipe off the face of the earth
wipe someone's eye
with a fine tooth comb
with all one's heart
with an eye to
with every bone in one's body
with hand on heart
with one hand tied behind your back
with one's bare face hanging out
with one's bare hands
with one's eyes open
with one's tail between one's legs
with open arms
with something in mind
within earshot
work your fingers to the bone
worms in blood
wrangle for an ass's shadow
wrap around one's (little) finger
wrap one's head around
wring one's neck
wring your hands
written all over your face
wrong-footed

yellow-belly
yoke around one's neck
you can't get blood from a stone
you can't sit in two chairs with one butt
you're all heart
young at heart
your face doesn't fit
your heart sinks

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Books by Lea Tassie

Tour Into Danger

Cats in Clover
Siamese Summers
Cat Under Cover
Cats & Crayons
Calico Cat Caper

Deception Bay
Deep Water
Dire Straits

Green Blood Rising
Red Blood Falling
Shockwave

A Clear Eye
Double Image
Eyes Like a Hawk

Harvest
Walking the Windsong
Connections

Two Shakes of a Lamb's Tail
Baa Baa Black Sheep, Have You Any Words?
The Wordy Ram
Wild and Woolly Words
Body Bits

Books by Lea Tassie and Leanne Taylor

Medieval Mosaic I
Medieval Mosaic II
Medieval Mosaic III

About the Book

This book is about interesting idioms (around 1,350 of them) that contain body part names. Those about eyes, ears, heart, hands, and fingers seem to have generated the most idioms, which makes sense because those are the parts we seem to use more than any others.

In any case, if you have a hand like a foot, a hungry belly which has no ears, and a monkey on your back, don't worry if you're caught with your hand in the cookie jar or being as crooked as a dog's hind leg, because the fickle finger of fate will find you some hair of the dog that bit you to prove that you're not just a pretty face (even if it does look like a wet weekend), and then everything will be as fine as frog's hair and you'll win hands down. It's a no-brainer.

About the Author

Lea Tassie grew up on an isolated homestead in northern British Columbia. Now she lives and writes in the beautiful, temperate, Pacific Coast rainforest. Her fiction includes cat humor, science fiction, and mainstream novels. Her non-fiction deals in a light-hearted way with the weird words and phrases found in the English language.